

Taking Back *Mi Lengua*:
Spanish Rock, Space, and Authenticity in Chicana/o Barrios &
Academia

A Dissertation

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this sacrifice to mi familia, mis
ancestros, y mi hijo Diego Tlatoani Topete-Rodriguez.

ABSTRACT

My goal is to understand forms of cultural survival for Chicanas/os¹ who attend U.S. public school systems, from K-12 to post-secondary education. I argue that U.S. public schools are invested in assimilating people of color into English speaking mainstream Americans, and in the process create an environment of shame and low self-esteem that students then carry with them throughout their academic paths. The dissertation will focus on the legitimacy placed on English language and the ostracizing of those who do not or cannot comply with U.S. linguistic standards imposed by public school models. In conversation with canonical American Studies works that describe the formation of this nation, this dissertation research will focus on how Chicana/o identity is shaped by the loss of language and forced assimilation. Centered in a society that highly values English speakers, this dissertation work will review literature that reflects the daily struggles of those who do not fit the hegemonic standards of the U.S. and their strategies of recovering access to Spanish to create their own cultural language "in between" these cultural worlds. In particular, I will explore this process through an engagement of Spanish language rock music or *rock en Español*.

In the U.S., Spanish language music had a significant spike in popularity in the late 1990s and early 2000s with what was dubbed by the media as the "Latin Explosion." This cultural phenomenon has been marked with the mainstream popularity success of artists like Ricky Martin, Enrique Iglesias, and Jennifer Lopez. While much of their success was due to English language lyrics by Latino artists, many artists who only sang in Spanish benefited from the popularity and had much success in the U.S. This dissertation work focuses on those artists who were/are not only

¹ Chicana/o will be used to describe first, second, and beyond generation migrants who have significant time in U.S. systems like public schools.

invested in Spanish language rock, but I argue are also speaking back to romanticized notions of Mexican nationalism that allow Chicanas/os to access alternative spaces for knowledge production. A focus on Spanish language rock in this paper will shed light on spaces that facilitate expression of a contemporary Chicana/o identity related to but separate from the 1960's Chicano nationalist period. This paper will test the argument that these sites of knowledge facilitate not only brief acts of awareness to a particular issue, but spark moments of political consciousness that inform other forms of quotidian action. More specifically, this dissertation will focus on the ways that engagement with these sites of knowledge facilitate dialogues that begin to challenge narratives of Chicanas/os as criminals, delinquents, and as an overall burden to U.S. society. I argue that these sites of knowledge create a transnational dialogue that allows many Chicanas/os in the U.S. to feel as if they have a place/space in which they belong; an identity that transgresses the legal border.

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"El Anglo con cara de inocente nos arrancó la lengua. Wild tongues can't be tamed, they can only be cut out."-Gloria Anzaldúas

Chapter 1

Introduction

As Mexican immigrants, Mexican Americans and Chicanas/os struggle to survive in the U.S. many are forced to find spaces of resistance towards blatant criminalization, discrimination, both physical and psychological violence, and racialization in public schools and their communities. This work will focus on the experiences of second-generation Mexican migrants of the late 20th and early 21st centuries whose first tongue was Spanish and who were forced to lose it in U.S. schools. This work will also engage strategies of resistance and identity construction mechanisms. From an early age, Chicanas/os learn that Spanish is a deficit that will only affect them negatively in their academic pursuits. Even worse, is the development of what Gloria Anzaldúa describes as a "bastard language" that is seen as a deficit both in mainstream society and at home. She states, "Chicanas who grew up speaking Chicano Spanish have internalized the belief that we speak poor Spanish. It is illegitimate, a bastard language. And because we internalize how our language has been used against us by the dominant culture, we use our language differences against each other." ²

² Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Third Ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007), 80.

I show that these messages are creating strict dichotomies of identity that often do not reflect the lived realities of Chicanas/os in the community and are forced to live on the outside of both cultures. This work will focus on *rock en Español*³ as a site of resistance for many Chicanas/os who are constantly reminded that their identity and culture are a burden on U.S. society. I theorize that for many Chicanas/os the simple act of listening to Spanish music in a place that requires the use of English triggers an insurgency to reclaim their lost language, culture, and identity through quotidian resistance. *Rock en Español* facilitates spaces for identity negotiation for many Chicanas/os who are forced to lose their native tongue and cultural affinities in the assimilation process of public education. While taking back their native language complicates U.S. mainstream expectations of identity, I am not arguing that they are conforming to Mexican nationalism, but are creating a "third space"⁴ that allows them to survive in between these worlds. Nor are they trying to essentialize Mexican nationalism but seeking to understand and articulate how a positive attachment to cultural identity can lead to positive self-esteem for Chicanas/os.

³ Translated to Spanish language rock

⁴ Adela C. Licona, "(B)orderlands' Rhetorics and Representations: The Transformative Potential of Feminist Third-Space Scholarship and Zines." *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 17 No. 2 (Summer 2005). Also see David G. Gutiérrez, "Migration, Emergent Ethnicity and the 'Third Space': The Shifting Politics of Nationalism in Greater Mexico" *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 86, No. 2, 1999.

Bills like California's Proposition 187 in 1994 that proposed restrictions on public services to undocumented migrants and their children and 1998's Proposition 227 that restricted schools from allowing multi-year bilingual education to students, continue a long history of anti-immigrant and anti-Mexican sentiments. This work will argue that listening to *rock en Español* is one way that Chicanas/os have begun to socially challenge anti-immigrant bills in their own way. An engagement with spaces that inspire a level of social consciousness and advancement of the self allows for an awareness that can lead to quotidian forms of activism. This consciousness and awareness can manifest in a variety of ways, but in particular the music of *rock en Español* groups *Caifanes* and *Jaguares* allows Chicanas/os to question their position as Mexicans in the U.S. and leads many through third spaces via concert venues that facilitate communal and personal reflection of identity formation.

This research will begin in the late 1990's in the U.S., with the "Latin Explosion" and continue to the present. Although this research is placed in chronological time, it is important to make connections to a lived history that Chicanas/os carry with them everyday. Giving tributes to *los antepasados* (ancestors) in altars, prayers, and celebrations, Chicanas/os are constantly complicating notions of Western time. In the article "Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion" by Carolyn Dinshaw,

Carla Freccero complicates time as a writer by placing her existence in the past, present, and future.⁵

I often work on the dead, and as time goes by I have begun to think of myself as a future dead person writing myself out of my time while time is running out. Before, there was always now (mostly there was "now!") or (back) then, or someday, and then it seemed like the deictics were just that, temporal markers relative to a context. At a certain point (then? now?), they became more absolute: past, present, and future became substantive conditions sometimes related to me and sometimes not.

As I write my self into this narrative, I am doing so as an extension of past, present, and future narratives and histories of Chicanas/os. By understanding identity in and outside of time, this dissertation will continue narratives that write Chicanas/os as agents in history. In "Queer Times," Carla Freccero continues and rejects notions of empirical history.

...the task of critiquing historicism and troubling periodization by rejecting a notion of empirical history and allowing fantasy and ideology an acknowledged place in the production of "fantasmatic" historiography as a way to get at how subjects live, not only their histories, but history itself, to the extent that history is lived through fantasy in the form of ideology.

In this way, history is not just simply something that we have to learn in order to not repeat, but something that is embedded in Chicanas/o quotidian lived experiences. By carrying

⁵ Dinshaw, Carolyn, Lee Edelman, Roderick A. Ferguson, Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, Judith Halberstam, Annamarie Jagose, Christopher S. (Christopher Shaun) Nealon, and Tan Hoang Nguyen. 2007. "Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion". *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*. 13 (2): 177-195.

this living history in U.S. barrios, Chicanas/os are challenging how history should be remembered, practiced, and authenticated. Here Chicanas/os do not need academia to tell them their histories, struggles, or their identity.

While for many Chicanas/os identity mainly consists of a rejection of an assimilated "American" identity and a romanticized understanding of their Aztec ancestry, these dialogues allow many to question U.S. society. In particular, I argue that dialogues within *rock en Español* are challenging what it means to be American, Mexican, and Chicana/o by engaging with international movements in these spaces of cultural exchange. While for most Chicanas/os the engagement with these questions may end at the concert, this simple act of awareness can begin to disrupt the engrained notions of American superiority that is constant in U.S. society. Here the concert venue becomes a space of communal love and resistance where conversations about social activism and participation in change can occur. Similarly, it facilitates a space for participants to begin to question the negative attributes that are placed on people of color's culture in the U.S. The dynamic spaces where listeners engage with *rock en Español* allows many Chicanas/os to question the Americanization process that occurs in U.S. public school systems and how different generations of migrants engage with assimilation. While, this consciousness of identity may not be totally accurate and may negate the experiences of many indigenous people and their treatment in Mexico, this identity

allows many the tools to mentally survive in a place that just wants them to conform or leave. While this identity can be what Gloria Anzaldúa calls a "bastardized" identity, those that are forced to separate from their culture in the U.S., and later attempt to reclaim it, are at a disadvantage because they have to do it from a place based on books and what is projected as "authentic" by academia, and not by lived experiences.

At the same time Chicanas/os who listen to and participate in the spaces created by rock en Español are consuming an identity and culture that can be tied to capitalism and globalization. As rock en Español and other Latina/o Spanish-speaking artists sign with multi-billion dollar companies like Sony U.S. Latin, I argue that they are also creating informal economies as they are invested in raising awareness and consciousness of how Chicanas/os have to negotiate with these power structures.

In this country, nationalistic pride is founded on the belief that we live in the greatest democracy in the world. This is related to the next myth about the global economy, that no acceptable alternatives to the current forms of U.S. democracy and capitalism exist. There are scores of people who understand the falsehood of this core value. Few people who have been victimized by racial-profiling and a decidedly unequal justice system believe we live in a free society.⁶

In this way people of color in the U.S. have a different relationship with capitalism and globalization as they are

⁶ Edén E. Torres, *Chicana without apology=Chicana sin vergüenza: the new Chicana cultural studies* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 51.

criminalized in their own home. In many ways, Chicanas/os have to engage to disengage, as there is some form of agency in the way they choose to spend their hard earned money. Although these record labels are getting wealthier and helping advance narratives of U.S. "nationalistic pride," the spiritual, emotional, and consciousness building that occurs in these spaces is testament of the cultural fortitude that Chicanas/os have historically displayed. In his chapter "'The Sun Never Sets on MTV': Tijuana NO! and the Border of Music Video," Josh Kun speaks to the ways music groups can be signed to major record labels and still disrupt notions of neoliberal capitalism. "...Tijuana NO! may be part of the global network of MTV Latin America, but its performances operate as "subversive noise," noise that disrupts the order of the system it is produced within by generating interference that prophecies the coming of a potential new order.⁷" This "subversive noise" allows Chicanas/os to engage with bands that are signed to large record labels in different ways. While they are contributing to capitalism, they are also participating in communal acts of resistance by supporting bands that challenge U.S. master narratives.

Understanding cultural identity consciousness as a form of resistance can be a powerful tool for youth of color to express a level of agency. Often, people of color have feelings of

⁷ Josh Kun, "'The Sun Never Sets on MTV': Tijuana NO! and the Border of Music Video," in Michille Habell-Pallán and Mary Romero ed. *Latino/a Popular Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 107.

hopelessness when it comes to their role in U.S. society. The U.S. school systems are invested in creating almost impossible definitions of "resistance," "movements," and "consciousness," etc., especially when it comes to people of color. For example U.S. history only recognizes figures like Martin Luther King, Gandhi, or César Chávez, and this creates a definition and sets the standard of resistance that many people may never reach/achieve. These figures not only set a very specific model of what a activist or revolutionary looks like, but it also defines the movement itself. For many youth of color growing up in working class communities, these activists and movements speak very little to the struggles they live on a daily basis. From an early age people of color are engrained with definitions and standards that often do not reflect their lived experience, and I argue this is what forces many to quit or simply not engage with academia, social movements, community organizing, etc. This work will shed light on spaces that allow people of color to create their own definitions and standards that are more reflective of their lived experiences. This newly defined notion of resistance becomes the basis to what it means to be an "activist" and how to be "politically engaged" in community. Those that attend U.S. public school systems are told from an early age what it means to be a "successful" citizen, what history to remember, what language to speak and how to speak it properly. These narratives only allow for some people of color to find "success" in the U.S. and thus the exclusivity leaves many in the margins.

It is here in the margins that I begin my research to understand how people of color find their own definitions of resistance, knowledge, culture, and identity. In her book *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*, Lisa Lowe states: "It is through culture that the subject becomes, acts, and speaks itself as 'American.' It is likewise in culture that individuals and collectivities struggle and remember and, in that difficult remembering, imagine and practice both subject and community differently."⁸ It is this difference of remembering that I argue is a form of resistance that is practiced in various cultural sites.

Contributions to Existing Scholarship:

This work will focus on the influences that *rock en Español* has on Chicanas/os growing up in the U.S. through a literature review of work that analyzes the role music has on identity in the fields of Cultural Studies and Chicana/o Studies. The fields' interdisciplinary focus will allow this work to engage with terms like transnationalism, identity, and resistance that speak to the dynamic experiences of Chicanas/os in the U.S. I argue that those who listen to this music are participating in and helping to create a transnational identity that assists in their survival mentally, spiritually, and physically. This work will investigate through multiple methodologies, how Spanish music, in particular *rock en Español*, can inform Chicana/o identity through lyrics,

⁸ Lowe, Lisa, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996, 3.

spaces, and style. It is the goal of this research to investigate the transnational connections that Spanish music forges between Chicanas/os and their understanding of themselves as international agents. In particular, this work will look into the ways Chicanas/os construct narratives of Mexican nationality through this music and its social spaces. By focusing on *rock en Español* groups *Caifanes* and *Jaguares* and their media representation, this work hopes to find how these groups' public images are presented in a glorified manner, as they are discussed in the media with almost divine attributes. I find that this glorification plays a crucial role in informing Chicana/o understandings of their Mexican nationality. While this glorification may be problematic as it places divine status on the group, I argue that for many Chicanas/os it can be the unique space of a consciousness that exudes cultural pride and self-worth and that facilitates an agency to begin to counter overt assimilationist thought that has caused much damage to many Chicanas'/os' view of themselves and their cultural value.

The term transnationalism will be used in this work to understand a fluid, ever changing identity that is rooted in Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of borderlands identity. While many can see this transnational identity as contradictory or inauthentic, this work will attempt to show the dynamic influences that many Chicanas/os experience in the barrio that allow them to survive in a country that demands assimilation. While these pressures can manifest in many different ways, this dissertation will focus on

the ways that transnational influences on Chicanas/os can begin to engage an identity and consciousness that complicates mainstream understandings of this community. *Rock en Español* groups create transnational spaces in which Chicanas/os can understand their Mexican identity and how it influences their lived experience in the U.S. In conversation with Anzaldúa and drawing from Benedict Anderson, I will create a definition of transnationalism that reflects the complexities of living in the U.S. as an outsider and having an "imagined" national identity of another place that many Chicanas/os have merely visited, if at all. Bringing these two scholars into conversation will allow for a dialogue that explores cultural production as a site for resistance in U.S. barrios, how different generations of migrants engage with culture in the U.S., and how Mexican nationalism is constructed in the U.S. and how it is practiced and engaged with.

This work will shed light on the complex identities that first and second generation migrants have to create when they are forced to assimilate to a U.S. hegemonic identity by attending public school systems. A focus on nation building will also serve to review the violent history of Americanization that continues today in U.S. institutions. An engagement with Chicana Feminist theories will allow a reflection on Chicana/o identity that complicates the nationalist identities that are simply not complex enough to speak to life in the barrio. Engagement with concepts like Gloria Anzaldúa's "Mestiza Consciousness," and Dolores Delgado Bernal's "Pedagogies of the Home" will allow this

work to be in dialogue with binary identity formation around “American” and/or Chicano nationalism. Understanding how Chicanas/os negotiate their identity by creating a balance of different lived experiences; Chicana Feminist thought will inform an alternative form of consciousness and subjectivity that is not bound by strict notions of identity.

This work will also address a neglected genre of music, *rock en Español*, in Chicana/o scholarship that is very much alive in the barrio. In dialogue with this music, this work will engage with concepts of language and cultural reclamation, construction of Mexican nationalism from abroad, and sites of resistance to U.S. hegemonic identities. While these conversations are typical in scholarship, this work is distinct in that it will engage a space facilitated by *rock en Español* where all these complications occur simultaneously. Understanding the role that Spanish music has on developing a culture of resistance, this work will focus on those spaces that allow for alternative forms of knowledge that counter narratives that are prevalent in U.S. school systems about Latino people.

I engage with multiple methodologies to ensure a diverse understanding of the ways that music can affect cultural representation. As Latina/o populations continue to grow in the U.S., it is crucial to understand how the assimilation process, mainly in U.S. school systems, negatively affects Latina/o student’s sense of self, cultural identity, and language usage.

Although the assimilation process intends to incorporate people into its citizenry, I argue that a long history of racial discrimination only serves to discredit non-white cultures and place people of color on the outside of white society. This research then intends to continue a long legacy of struggle and activism to raise awareness of the complicated history that people of color have had with U.S. power structures and their attempts to construct their own spaces, knowledge, and history. Through participant observation and self-reflection, this work will follow me through my educational journey and the various concerts that I have attended. It is my goal to insert my voice and experience in this work to continue in a history of Chicana/o Studies scholarship that emphasizes the value of this reflection. As a person of color it is crucial that I find ways to find agency in my education and begin to develop my own pedagogies. In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, bell hooks emphasizes the need to challenge the conventional classroom and allow for anyone to share their voice and/or experiences.

As a teacher, I recognized that students from marginalized groups enter classrooms within institutions where their voices have been neither heard nor welcomed, whether these students discuss facts—those which any of us might know—or personal experience. My pedagogy has been shaped to respond to this reality. If I do not wish to see these students use the “authority of experience” as a means of asserting voice, I can circumvent this possible misuse of power by bringing to the classroom pedagogical strategies that

affirm their presence, their right to speak, in multiple ways on diverse topics.⁹

Through my experience in graduate school, my voice was not taken seriously. When I would speak, I was asked to justify myself or I would be reminded not to offend others. Instead of having to do that and attempt to soothe the guilt of others, my voice in this dissertation is a testimony to all the ways other students and I are silenced. In its articulation, this testimony can be reflected on as a way to heal.

Also, I interview people who share the experience of attending and participating in spaces facilitated by *rock en Español*. This work attempts to document voices that complicate traditional narratives of Chicana/o experience in the barrio. I use pseudonyms for them in order to protect their identities from future affiliations with academic institutions. Archival research also enables me to understand the ways that *rock en Español* has been written about in the U.S. and internationally in magazines and newspapers. It is my hope to find distinct differences in the way *rock en Español* groups are written about that can inform the way that groups and their identities are understood and reproduced.

⁹ bell hooks, *Teaching to transgress: education as the practice of freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 83-84.

Chapter Breakdown:

Chapter 2, "Antes De Que Nos Olviden:" Claiming Voice and Space in U.S. School Systems will interrogate the ways that Chicanas/os in higher education attempt to insert their voices and languages in their work. Through concepts like Delgado Bernal's "Pedagogies of the Home" and Gloria Anzaldua's "Mestiza Consciousness," this work aims to uncover the various ways that Chicanas/os use their cultural knowledge and theories to survive in academic spaces. This work will argue that music spaces, in particular *rock en Español* can become pedagogy of home and that it can be a tool for Chicanas/os to stake their claim in academia.

In this chapter, I hope to follow in the footsteps of so many great women of color feminists like Edén Torres, bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Dolores Delgado Bernal who have facilitated my own journey through academia and to understand my role as a straight, able-bodied, cisgendered, light-skinned man of Mexican descent in these spaces. While I understand that my gender allows me to not experience many of the difficulties women of color endure in academia, their work allows me to understand my role in negotiating and bridging my involvement in the Chicana/o community and in academia through analyzing relations of power based on socially constructed categories. By not having to completely compromise my culture, cultural knowledge, and

cultural production, women of color scholarship has shown me that one does not have to give up one's voice to be heard in academia.

This chapter will use personal narratives of my own journey in academia highlighting one story of "success" in a system that I argue set me up for failure from the start. Along with personal narratives, a focus on interviews with Chicana/o students will guide a narrative of survival and the experiences of people of color in higher education. The goal of this is to discuss the adjustments and difficulties people of color endure when moving from studies that are more inclusive of knowledge from non-scholarly avenues or what Delgado Bernal calls "Pedagogies of the Home," to strict academic fields that do not accept alternative styles of writing, research, and knowledge. I argue that these difficulties often weigh heavily on a student's mind, emotions, and self-esteem making it very difficult to survive in those spaces. It is precisely those survival skills that lie at the heart of this work, in particular how music (Spanish or any music) can become of source of self-empowerment, a source of "Pedagogies of the Home", and a connection to a community that is not allowed in most academic classes.

Chapter 3, "Nunca Me Voy A Transformar En Ti": Negotiations of Mexican Nationalism in Chicana/Chicano Identity will shed light on the *rock en Español* scene in the United States and explore the way in which transnational messages influence Chicana/o identity formation. This research will interrogate the

Mexican nationalist project that many *rock en Español* groups are invested in through their music, interviews, and concerts. In particular this work will investigate the use of concerts on Mexican holidays, like Mexican Independence Day and *Cinco de Mayo* in the U.S. by the group *Caifanes* and *Jaguares*. I argue that the groups' investment to play in the U.S. on Mexican holidays speaks to a transnational connection between Mexican youth, Mexicanas/os living outside of their homeland and Chicanas/os. Through an analysis of various newspapers in the U.S. and Mexico, this work will highlight the ways the *rock en Español* groups, *Caifanes* and *Jaguares*, as well as the lead singer of both groups, Saúl Hernández, are represented on both sides of the border. I find that the group's investment in critiquing the Mexican state is more prominent in Mexico. This will guide my research in understanding how Mexican nationality is constructed in the U.S., as it becomes difficult for the group to critique the Mexican state in an audience of Chicanas/os who are invested in a Mexican identity that is based on romantic notions of home. Also, by understanding the differences in media coverage of this work can begin to understand the role *rock en Español* plays in creating a Mexicana/o, Chicana/o identity for many people in the U.S. that may have no other connection to Mexico other than the transnational identity that is created in spaces like Los Angeles, California. This media representation will show a difference in creating romanticized narratives of *rock en Español* groups that contributes to an understanding of Mexican identity

in the U.S. This romanticized narrative becomes a crucial point to creating a notion of home for many Chicanas/os in the U.S. who may feel in between worlds.

Chapter 4, "Me Estoy Quedano sin Sangre:" The Nation, The New Frontier, and Chicana/o identity reclamation will focus on a history of nation building and the process of Americanization that exists for many migrants in the U.S. In particular this work will focus on the Americanization process that occurs in the public school systems for Chicanas/os and the ways they negotiate their identity in the U.S. Focusing on alternative spaces, in particular engagement with *rock en Español*, this work will investigate the ways that Chicanas/os begin to take back their language, culture, and traditions in response to the assimilation process in the school systems. This work will be highlighted by literature that addresses the Americanization process that is evident in U.S. school, regardless of race. Also, personal narratives taken from interviews will highlight the diverse experiences that Chicanas/os lived through during the Americanization process. It is the goal of this chapter to highlight what it means for Chicanas/os to be caught between two worlds, one that criminalizes and shames their culture and another that shames and humiliates them for not representing their culture and language "correctly." This chapter hopes to find that Chicanas/os that are caught between these two worlds often develop an alternative identity that speaks to both, distinctly.

Chapter 5, "*Detras de los Cerros:*" *Rock en Español* and a transnational Chicana/o identity will focus on the ways that Chicanas/os engage with concepts of a Mexican homeland through *rock en Español*. It engages conversations around the way that a romanticized understanding of a Mexican homeland is a crucial survival strategy for people who are criminalized, discriminated against, and are targets of violence at every level in American society. This violence often comes as Mexican immigrants are used as symbolic opposites or "others" by politicians catering to, or exploiting, the fears and resentments of whites who have been hurt by global capitalism. In this scenario, Mexican immigrants and their children come to stand for everything that is wrong with America. It is a strategy that not only blames them for lower wages but takes our attention away from the sins of corporations and conservative support for big business. This romanticization of Mexico as a homeland is often stronger among U.S. born Chicanas/os, as their feelings of displacement are often rooted in an identity of "ni de aqui, ni de alla." Through concepts like Aztlán and Indigenous Mexican Ancestry, second generation Chicanas/os imagine a Mexico that may not be based on actual lived experiences that first generation migrants know, thus often creating rifts in coalition building. While these romantic understandings may not be based on actual lived experiences, they are a crucial part of survival for people who feel displaced in the U.S. and feel that they will always have a home in their imagined Mexico.

Continuing with ethnographic fieldwork, this chapter will be guided by interviews of people who have experienced life in both Mexico and the U.S., and of Chicanas/os who have attended U.S. schools. The goal of these interviews is to first document oral histories of Chicanas/os who have not benefited from U.S. essentialist narratives and have had to create their own histories of survival. Secondly, these interviews will serve as a testimony to the actual lived experiences of Chicanas/os in public schools and the meritocratic narratives that place all the blame of "failure" on the students, their cultures, and their parents. While many first generation migrants to the U.S. may find difficulties adjusting to life outside of their home, this work will argue that their understanding of home is centered on a reality of lived experiences that can give them a strong sense of self and pride. I want to show that this sense of self and pride allows for first generation migrants to better adjust to life in the U.S., especially for those who enter at a young age and are required to attend U.S. school systems.

On the other hand, interviews with second-generation migrants will look into the ways a Mexican homeland is constructed in order to adjust to life in the U.S. I argue that for many Chicanas/os growing up in this country their sense of self is not as developed as first generation migrants, due to messages of American supremacy that they receive from an early age. These messages often translate to having a low self-esteem, loss of language, loss of Mexican culture, and to poor academic

production especially if and when Chicanas/os begin to rebel
against American supremacist thoughts.

"En la escuela nos enseñan a memorizar fechas de batallas, pero que poco nos enseñan de amor"¹⁰ - Los Fabulosos Cadillacs

"Somos sumisos y obedientes. Con ganas de gritar, con ganas de matar. Pero hace tiempo que aquí nos educan para mentir"-Caifanes

Chapter 2

"Antes De Que Nos Olviden:"

Claiming Voice and Space in U.S. School Systems

My years in high school were not the greatest. In fact, I hated high school so much that I would ditch at least one day out of the week until they told me that I would not graduate. Still, the teachers trying to educate me did not welcome my presence in the classroom. In particular, I would regularly be kicked out of my history classes for shouting "that's the white man's knowledge" in the middle of class lectures. While I know now that this is very disrespectful, I also understand that my shout was a part of an engagement with knowledge that I viewed as inaccurate and unfair. It was the frustrated cry of an upset teenager testing his identity. I believe this is the case with many youth of color who do not see themselves reflected in the knowledge that they are forced to receive.

In *The Evolution of Deficit Thinking: Educational Thought and Practices*, Richard R. Valencia describes some of the many factors that push Chicanas/os out of school. He writes that "Millions of low-socioeconomic status (SES) minority students

¹⁰ Fabulosos Cadillacs. "Mal Bicho," *Rey Azúcar* (Columbia, EPIC, 1995.) "In school they teach us to memorize dates of battle, but how little they teach us of love." Translated by author.

(particularly, African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Puerto Ricans) attend schools that are segregated, inequitably financed, vapid in curricula delivery, teacher-centered and generally hostile in any sense of learning environment."¹¹ With such great stakes against them, many students of color will simply disengage or may engage with the material to challenge it. Whatever the case, the overwhelming push out rate for people of color should be sufficient evidence that the current educational practices throughout the United States are simply not working.

While some will identify with U.S. mainstream educational practices, preconceived racist knowledge about students does not allow teachers to see all with the same potential. In her article "Early Racist Discourses: The Roots of Deficit Thinking," Martha Menchaca discusses the history of racist institutions, particularly in U.S. schools, that justify the discriminatory treatment of people of color. Menchaca writes that "Out of these discourses came beliefs that racial minorities were physically, cognitively or culturally inferior to whites." Consequently, Menchaca continues, "such deficit thinking was used to justify the economic exploitation of people of color and to deny them the social and political rights enjoyed by whites."¹² These preconceived thoughts, along with the fact that they are

¹¹ Richard R.Valencia, ed. *The Evolution of Deficit Thinking: Educational Thought and Practices* (Washington, D.C.: The Falmer Press, 1997), 1.

¹² Martha Menchaca, "Early Racist Discourses: The Roots of Deficit Thinking," in *The Evolution of Deficit Thinking: Educational Thought and Practices* (Washington, D.C.: The Falmer Press, 1997), 37.

racialized and tracked from an early age, often eliminate a student of color's chance at "success." Success is thus determined under ideas of whiteness that forces and requires students of color to lose their language and home culture in order to be successful in school.

This chapter will focus on some of the institutional factors that gear youth of color toward failure in U.S. public schools. By focusing on creating students that are "responsible citizens," I argue that the U.S. public school system is not invested in educating youth of color. Instead the educational system is invested in assimilating them to a system where they are merely subservient members that will follow the status quo. In this way people of color are not seen as knowledge producers unless they invest in systems of white supremacy. In "Latino Population Growth, Demographic Characteristics, and Educational Stagnation: An Examination of Recent Trends," Jorge Chapa and Belinda De La Rosa discuss the disparaging statistics in the year 2000, between whites and non-whites pursuing a doctoral degree. They state:

There is still a great disparity between Anglos and minorities in the number of individuals receiving doctorate degrees... in 2000, Anglos received 22,911 doctorates. By comparison, Latinos received only 1,157; African Americans received 1,656; Asians received 1,407; and American Indians received 169 doctorates. Minority doctoral students combined represents 16% of the doctorates awarded in 2000.¹³

¹³ Chapa, Jorge and Belinda De La Rosa. "Latino Population Growth, Demographic Characteristics, and Educational Stagnation:

These statistics speak to a system that has historically marked people of color as not capable of learning. While the numbers of people in higher education will continue to rise because of population growth, U.S. academic institutions have not shown the investment in changing the drastic disparity between whites and non-whites in campuses throughout the country.

Secondly, this chapter will focus on the students who refuse to or cannot become part of the status quo, and the strategies they use to survive in this hostile environment. Through the use of personal narrative and ethnographic fieldwork, I document how people of color are forced to lose their language, respect for their culture, and respect for themselves. I also highlight the struggle and consequences for those who resist.

I interviewed 10 people that identify as Chicanas/os, Mexicanas/os, and Americans. Participants all identified as 1st or second generation migrants to the U.S. The interviews were conducted in Minnesota and Los Angeles with people who attended U.S. school systems, speak Spanish, and listened to rock en Español. The goal of the interviews was to document experiences of people who attended U.S. schools and their treatment as Spanish speakers. I wanted to document a narrative of resistance, where listening to Spanish language music rejects anti-Latina/o, anti-immigrant, and anti-Spanish sentiments that are very visible in U.S. schools. Here these interviews serve to tell a story of

An Examination of Recent Trends." Education and Urban Society, Vol. 36 No. 2, February 2004: 130-149.

pride in one's cultural heritage, in spite of attempts to indoctrinate and shame people of color.

Through a literature review of work on racist practices in U.S. school systems, I focus on the structural investment in having people of color assimilate in schools and how this system of assimilation sets up students of color for failure. By starting the assimilation process in elementary school, students are more easily manipulated to accept the indoctrination and subscribe to a racialized understanding of success. Also, I will examine how a literature review on Chicana feminist thought guides a discussion on the strategies many students of color employ in order to survive mentally and spiritually in and out of U.S. institutions.

Chicana/o identity and belonging in US schools

When I began silk-screening my own t-shirts in high school, with images of Zapatistas, Mexica Guerreras/os, and my favorite rock en Español group Caifanes and Jaguares, it did very little to help me be "successful" in the classroom. As I began to half-read books about Mexica cultures, the Zapatista movement, and books that reflected my identity it further validated my suspicion that my high school education was simply a way to assimilate me. The class discussion from my white history teachers began to make me angrier by the day. I quickly found myself having to sit outside the classroom or in the counselor's office. Subsequently, I began to validate a voice inside me that

wanted to emerge, even if it did not have a place in my education or if I did not have the language to articulate it.



Figure 1: T-shirts made by author in highschool graphic arts class in 1997.

In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, bell hooks speaks to the investment schools have to obedience and assimilation. hooks writes that "Now, we were mainly taught by white teachers whose lessons reinforced racist stereotypes. For black children, education was no longer about the practice of freedom. Realizing this, I lost my love for school."¹⁴ As a child I did not understand the shame against my culture from my majority white teachers, and although I had to repeat kindergarten because of my lack of English skills, I

¹⁴ bell hooks. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 3.

survived my elementary school education without putting too much attention on myself.

This was the case for many of the Chicana/o participants that I interviewed. Sal, a second-generation self proclaimed Mexican American describes his elementary school education and how his parents investment in education represented a possibility for a different life.

So he was "you either gonna do something in school or your gonna go do some labor shit," you know? So it was always what you had to do, what had to be done, you had to do good in school... and like I remember in beginning they had the program to where we still had bilingual stuff but once they took it away it seemed like it became frowned upon at that time to speak Spanish... or the whole factor of learning in Spanish was not as important as learning in English, so its kinda weird cuz you don't think about it back then, like when you start reflecting on it, its like "what the hell these guys just mind fucked us kinda deal," you know? In a sense, it gives you, it kinda starts to instill a sense of inferiority, you know? Like you are not good enough to learn, its kinda like that and it is set as an obstacle, cuz its either you learn how to learn in English or not going to do anything, you know what I mean?¹⁵

Sal recognized the negative messages about his language and culture and felt as if he needed to adjust his identity in order, "to do anything." Many Chicanas/os that enter U.S. school systems at an early age make this change automatically to please their teachers and their classmates. They are shamed and bullied into assimilating, and for a young child this is usually too much for them to defend themselves against. But there is also a more

¹⁵ Sal. Interviewed by Daniel Topete, March 25, 2014.

insidious force at play; a social contract that demands conformity.

"Dime si estoy vivo, si todavía respiro¹⁶:" Finding a voice:

As I entered junior high and high school, I began to question the racist and discriminatory nature of my school and environment. As my voice began to develop, I began to feel unhappy at school, as my teachers did not want to acknowledge me. People of color often face institutions in the U.S. that deem them inferior, incompetent, and unworthy of attention. My need to be engaged by my teachers was seen as disobedience and disrespect because students are not supposed to speak out of turn, question the curriculum, and challenge the white teachers.

bell hooks continues, "School was still a political place, since we were always having to counter white racist assumptions that we were genetically inferior, never as capable as white peers, even unable to learn."¹⁷ The mechanisms by which school systems continue to have predominately white teachers speaks to both the value placed on white knowledge producers and the need for people of color to culturally and linguistically meet white teachers at their comfort zone. It also speaks to the way inertia helps to maintain white supremacy within institutions. Here white privilege means not having to acknowledge student's culture, language, and knowledge, even in schools where the students are

¹⁶ Caifanes. "Cuéntame tu Vida," *El Diablito* (RCA Record Labels 1990.)

¹⁷ hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 4.

predominately Latina/o. In my interview with Rita she spoke about the disregard that her teachers and counselors had toward her and her mother when she tried to advocate for her education. When I asked her if she thought having her mother by her side advocating with her would have helped she stated:

Not necessarily, I feel like if they didn't take my opinion seriously, they would not have taken my mom's opinion any more seriously. I don't think they really cared, they didn't see how taking me out of a biology or geometry class, I think was the first class I was supposed to take in high school, they didn't see how it would end up impacting my ability to go to college, and to them I don't think it mattered whether I did or didn't take those classes because they were just concerned with me potentially graduating from high school not so much how it would look in my college applications.¹⁸

The "white racist assumptions that we were genetically inferior, never as capable as white peers, even unable to learn," that bell hooks speaks about is not assumed of students of color but also their parents. This sense of deficit thinking¹⁹ justifies teachers' disregard of a student and parents who are hungry for intellectual engagement, and instead creates narratives of Latina/o parents that do not care about their children's education. This humiliation allowed me to understand that it was not okay to engage and/or challenge the institution's knowledge, and that the voice that I was trying to develop was not important.

¹⁸ Rita. Interview by Daniel Topete, November 28, 2014.

¹⁹ See: Richard R.Valencia, ed., *The Evolution of Deficit Thinking: Educational Thought and Practices* (Washington, D.C.: The Falmer Press, 1997).

In his book, *Chicanas and Chicanos in Schools: Racial Profiling, Identity Battles, and Empowerment*, Marcos Pizarro not only describes what was happening to me and first generation Mexican-descent students, but also speaks of the consequences of not valuing Chicana/o youth in the classroom.

When Chicana/o students attend school in a context in which it is clear to them that they are distinguished from the authority figures in the school by class, race, or both, this situating can have a significant impact on the connection that they make to their schooling. Students are not blind to the subtle and sometimes overt messages that are conveyed when their home lives, culture, language, and experiences are deemed irrelevant and even detrimental to school success and success in society at large. If a Chicana/o student is made aware that she or he is racially and socioeconomically distinct (and inferior) from the authority figures (which can also include other students if the status of these students is more highly regarded), this racial-political climate can be linked to feeling a lack of ownership of the schooling process and to feeling distance between self and school.²⁰

Here Pizarro discusses how students become disempowered in their education and as knowledge producers. Chicana/o students carry a historical memory of institutional racism that has translated to spaces of shame in U.S. public school systems. Students are reminded that any knowledge they bring from home is not a part of their education; in fact it is seen as a hindrance.

U.S. schools position students of color to be passive participants in their education and accept all markers of

²⁰ Marcos Pizarro, *Chicanas and Chicanos in School: Racial Profiling, Identity Battles, and Empowerment* (Texas; University of Texas Press, 2005), 61.

success, from dress to gender expression. Those who show any kind of pride or acceptance of their culture or anything other than what teachers are comfortable with are immediately marked as at-risk students. In a conversation with Luis, a one and half generation self-identified Chicano, he spoke of not questioning the imposed assimilation by his teachers as they changed his name and did not allow him to speak Spanish.

No, no... It wasn't discussed... This was a time still, when there was very little Latino teachers in BGI (Bell Gardens Intermediate) elementary, there was none; intermediate school I mean. Really, really few... people were still trying to change your name into Anglo names, I remember I heard the first time someone call me Louie, and I thought it was weird, yeah that was my name in intermediate, they would call me. Mr. Achly would, he's a cool guy though, real cool guy. He would tell me you're now Louie, he would tell me like that. At the time I didn't even question it, I go 'okay that's what I am.' I was cool with it, I didn't even complain.²¹

Luis had to not only lose his native language but had to Americanize his name so his teachers could identify better with him. Does "Louie" have a better chance of success in the United States, than "Luis"? While Luis, acknowledges no ill will on the part of his teacher, this blatant investment by educators to Americanize students of color is clear.

In their chapter "Qui Bono?: Explaining-or Defending-Winners and Losers in the Competition for Educational Achievement," Walter R. Allen et. al speak to the categorization of students who identify with cultural markers.

²¹ Luis, interview with Daniel Topete, March 25, 2014.

As a result, teachers often ignore very intelligent students because they do not conform to external or interactional styles valued by teachers... As a result, students of color who embraced or signified Black or Latino cultural markers (e.g., speech, clothing, hairstyles, mannerisms) were automatically categorized and treated as poor students (read "bad" people).²²

This blatant disregard of students' potential due to their physical appearances speaks to the investment in producing a specific type of student that looks nothing like youth of color in the U.S. The complete investment of the school systems to first assimilate *then* educate students, forces many students to reject education. Here education becomes something that hurts, humiliates, and robs students of any form of identity and culture.

In her book, *Chicana Without Apology: The New Chicana Cultural Studies*, Edén E. Torres speaks to the trauma that many Chicanas/os experience through loss of language, culture, and history in U.S. public schools.

Though individuals deal with and respond to trauma and massive loss in a variety of ways, as a group Chicanas/os have not been allowed to or had the time to mourn or heal. Our grief is as disenfranchised and disavowed as we have been. For many Mexican Americans, the "memory" itself has been erased in U.S. history classes. While many rally around cries to "never forget" the horrors of Nazi crimes, no mainstream angst has been noted as Chicano and indigenous histories have been rendered invisible. Thus, it

²² Walter R. Allen, Susan A. Suh, Gloria González, and Joshua Yang. "Qui Bono?: Explaining-or Defending-Winners and Losers in the Competition for Educational Achievement" in *White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008), 226-227.

is almost impossible for us to understand the link between this memory of trauma and the extent of the devastation that comes from the shaming practices to which we are currently subjected.²³

This trauma is often inflicted on students from a young age and starts to manifest itself into resistant action when its effects become a visible obstacle to overcome; like being told that you will not graduate. Feelings of powerlessness and lack of agency makes students of color not only lose connection with their education but they learn to hate it. Education becomes yet another system of oppression, along with U.S. policies and laws, that tells them that they are different and do not belong. Torres continues,

As Mexican settlers we did not choose to lose our language and culture, to be included (yet excluded) in the original social experiment known as the United States of America. As a result of this material reality, we have been made relatively powerless over and within public and private institutions that directly affect our lives-churches, schools, governments, and the structures of commerce.²⁴

Communities of color that have historically experienced violence in the U.S. continue to be denied access to many of the systems that led to American success. Ignacio, a self-proclaimed Mexican American discusses how English is necessary in U.S. schools to have a chance at success. "Yeah it is, because as soon as they can get you speaking English and going with the flow, then everything is in English, down to math even the numbers are

²³ Edén E. Torres, *Chicana Without Apology: The New Chicana Cultural Studies* (New York; Routledge, 2003), 23.

²⁴ Torres, Edén E. (20)

in English. Like if you don't know English you are not going to advance... in anything, not in this country."²⁵ Not only is it necessary to speak English, but also for many Chicanas/os their culture and language becomes a point of shame through aggressive assimilation campaigns. Still, as communities of color continue to fight against a society that does not allow their histories, languages, and cultures to be included or even acknowledged, efforts to keep them marginalized and criminalized will continue.

As students of color disengage from the violence in the classroom, their "failure" is often attributed to racist ideologies of racial achievement gaps. Racist preconceived notions are engrained in society's understanding of "success" and are forced on students from an early age to make "responsible" citizens. These racist understandings in turn are used to analyze and reinforce racial hierarchy in a society that is invested in white supremacy. Walter R. Allen et.al., speaks to the ways racist statistical analysis is used to explain racial achievement gaps.

Moreover, a significant body of work promotes, directly or indirectly, theoretical explanations of the racial achievement gap that are biased, racist, and ultimately dehumanizing. The emphasis on analyzing large statistical data-sets risks dehumanizing disadvantaged students by ignoring the complex experiences that influence educational attainment.²⁶

²⁵ Ignacio, interview with Daniel Topete, March 25, 2014.

²⁶ Walter R. Allen, Susan A. Suh, Gloria González, and Joshua Yang, 217.

By shifting the blame to the student, these school systems simply wipe their hands of any responsibility. In turn these school systems are invested in "studies" that justify student's failures and exempts them from any guilt. By not taking any responsibility for student's failure, school systems in the U.S. simply do not see any need to restructure curriculum or power structures. In my interview with Chantico, she spoke of the ways U.S. institutions strip people of color of their humanity and how she connected her Mexican identity from abroad as a survival tactic.

It made me appreciate it more because understanding what do connections mean and understanding that those are the connections that have kept me human and have kept me grounded, that's why I value it... because everything, everything in the U.S. is intended to strip people from their humanity. Whether it is to make them more easily exploitable or allow them to not question their privilege or critique it, that's what the system ultimately, does.²⁷

While Chantico had a strong sense of cultural self as she attended elementary school in Mexico, many Chicanas/os who never get any sense of cultural pride are stripped of any positive attachments to their heritage. By investing in these U.S. power structures, a continued devaluation and criminalization of youth of color is perpetuated in order to meet quotas for low wagers and prisoners. In fact, the harsh reality is that there are disproportionate numbers of people of color to non-people of color that live at or below the poverty level and that are filling the U.S. prison systems.

²⁷ Chantico, interview with Daniel Topete, August 7, 2014.

In their report "Uneven Justice: State Rates of Incarceration By Race and Ethnicity," Marc Mauer and Ryan S. King discuss the disproportionate increase of Latinas/os in U.S. prisons.

In 2005, Hispanics comprised 20% of the state and federal prison population, a rise of 43% since 1990. As a result of these trends, one of every six Hispanic males and one of every 45 Hispanic females born today can expect to go to prison in his or her lifetime. These rates are more than double those for non-Hispanic whites.²⁸

As more schools are more concerned with keeping records of "at-risk" students than reducing the dropout rate, it is clear that interventions need to be made that will benefit students of color. While it may not completely be the educational system's responsibility we can no longer simply grant them innocence for the dehumanizing and criminalizing practices taken against youth of color. Additionally the overwhelming police presence in schools has made the criminalization of people of color even more evident. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault speaks of the formation of "docile" and "obedient" bodies.

The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A 'political anatomy', which was also a 'mechanics of power', was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the

²⁸ Marc Mauer, and Ryan S. King. "Uneven Justice: State Rates of Incarceration By Race and Ethnicity" Washington: The Sentencing Project, 2007).

techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an 'aptitude', a 'capacity', which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turning it into a relation of strict subjections.²⁹

I still remember clearly as my teachers would threaten students with discussions of bad behavior that would follow you forever in your record. These threats, while potentially empty, were used by teachers to create an environment of fear and teacher superiority to put people of color in their place. By instilling this criminal language of records these institutions are in fact attempting to create "docile" bodies that they can mold and control.

While it may be the case that it is not the individual teachers and administrators who are directly creating this violent environment for students of color, their direct or indirect participation in this system of oppression is fostering its growth. As "successful" products of this system, these teachers and administrators are trained to see value only in the systems in which they are invested. In his chapter "Why Students Drop Out of School," Russell W. Rumberger speaks to the many reasons why students may drop out of schools. He states, "First, dropping out is not simply a result of academic failure, but,

²⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York; Vintage Books, 1995), 138.

rather, often results from both social and academic problems in school. Second, these problems often appear early in students' school careers, suggesting the need for early intervention. Third, these problems are influenced by a lack of support and resources in families, schools, and communities."³⁰ These factors rarely make it into the discussion as to why students of color drop out. Instead the blame is placed solely on the student and parent(s), exonerating teachers and administrators of any responsibility. Rumberger continues.

These findings suggest that reducing dropout rates will require comprehensive approaches both to help at-risk students address the social and academic problems that they face in their lives and to improve the at-risk settings that contribute to these problems. Does the United States have the capacity and political will to reduce dropout rates and eliminate disparities in dropout rates among racial and ethnic groups?³¹

Often in U.S. public schools, these interventions never come. For many youth of color, teachers and school administrators have already set out their success and failure from a young age. While we can definitely state that U.S. policy makers have the capacity to reduce the dropout rate for students of color, I argue that they do not have the "political will" or invested interest to do so. By marking students as unintelligent, troubled

³⁰ Russell W. Rumberger, "Why Students Drop Out of School," in *Dropouts in America: Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis* (Massachusetts; Harvard Education Press, 2004).

³¹ Russell W. Rumberger, "Why Students Drop Out of School," in *Dropouts in America: Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis*. (Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press, 2004), 147-148.

or troublemakers, or simply not having the language skills to graduate, and by employing perpetually unequal funding based on property taxes, the U.S. public school systems are creating low wagers and people to fill their industrial prison systems. While many would claim that the discrepancies are not racialized, the governmental investment in dismantling charter schools geared toward students of color and ethnic and cultural studies programs through the country is proving otherwise. The statistics by Jorge Chapa and Belinda De La Rosa show a clear investment in white supremacy that many people of color cannot or will not comply with.³²

While it is not my intent to essentialize these charter schools, I do believe it is crucial for students of color to feel safe in their educational attainment, and not to feel like their language and culture is a hindrance to their educational success. Chantico discusses the feelings of isolation she felt as she moved to the U.S. from Mexico as a child, as she was not allowed to connect to her culture.

When I started feeling a racial identity in the U.S. context, it was really frightening. Because there were moments where I did not feel intelligent anymore, where I felt invisible. Where I literally remember walking down the hallways of the school and just feeling invisible. I couldn't tell if people did not remember me you know, and it still happens... it did not go away. But I remember that was a strange feeling, that I knew it was not the

³²Chapa, Jorge and Belinda De La Rosa. "Latino Population Growth, Demographic Characteristics, and Educational Stagnation: An Examination of Recent Trends." *Education and Urban Society*, Vol. 36 No. 2, February 2004: 130-149.

environment that I grew up in and that it was a different ballgame and I had a hard time trying to figure it out.³³

Chantico stresses the feelings of fear and isolation that she felt as she entered U.S. schools. She no longer felt safe at school and she began to question her intelligence. There is very little effort on the part of students, teachers, and school administrators to make U.S. schools a safe space for people who look and speak like Chantico. Instead, they are placed in transition programs where they are forced to sink or swim. So it becomes clear that U.S. schools are invested in tracking students of color. While it is not news that white students in the U.S. graduate high school and college at higher rates, it is important to shed light on the blatant motivations to keep white supremacy alive. By criminalizing anyone who does not fit the white standard, this system continues to implement racist ideologies. These racist narratives serve to justify the ways assimilation is enforced through the practices of school officials, standardized tests, and unequal funding to people of color neighborhood schools.

For many people of color, their skin tone becomes a difficult obstacle to overcome and plays an important role in gaining recognition as good students. Although many people of color give up their language, culture, and traditions for a chance at "success," they still have to overcome the systemic racism that makes it difficult to see beyond their phenotype. In

³³ Chantico, interview with Daniel Topete, August, 7, 2014.

his chapter "Sketching a Portrait of Public High School Graduation: Who Graduates? Who Doesn't?," Christopher B. Swanson speaks to the discrepancies between white, Asian, and students of color.

When results are broken down by race and ethnicity, we find that more than 75 percent of white and Asian students complete high school with a diploma. By stark contrast barely half of the students from historically disadvantaged minority groups graduated. Graduation rates for black, American Indian, and Hispanic students were 50, 51, and 53 percent, respectively. Male students complete high school at consistently lower levels than females.³⁴

The pressure for men of color to conform to U.S. mainstream ideals and to idealize whiteness is often too great to overcome. Even the smartest and brightest are pushed out as they are tracked by teachers who mark them as troubled for following the white status quo.

The universalization of particular forms of knowledge, in this case white knowledge, forces the rest of the world to reformulate their concepts of time, history, and understanding. Having to submit to white domination, cultures and people causes racialized others to lose their individuality by becoming subjects to this rule. Selena, a self-identified Mexicana spoke to me about her connection to being American and notions of whiteness. Although she was born in the U.S., lost her native

³⁴ Gary Orfield, ed. *Dropouts in America: Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis* (Massachusetts; Harvard Education Press, 2004), 14.

tongue, and navigated through all U.S. systems, her dark skin nonetheless put an asterisk on her American identity.

Well I think if I was around just white people I don't think I would be able to express myself in the same way or be as American as them. Cuz deep down inside I know I am not as American as them.

Question: Why do you think you're not as American as them?

Cuz I am not as white as them. Another thing when I was growing up, cuz I'm morena, I'm darker skinned I was always seen like by other girls too, like oh you're dark, you're ugly you know and I was like okay. I grew up with that you know and that sucks.³⁵

In this sense, all people only exist in relation to white patriarchal understandings, and all knowledge and culture is not valid, even if you consider yourself American, unless it relates to those in power. Even if Selena would like to consider herself American, her experiences with her phenotype have led her to understand that it is not really an option for her. Although her peers did the bullying, schools administrators and teachers foster this environment of shame and humiliation by not addressing it. In turn, the theories and methods used today in academia often reflect these subordinate understandings. Academia has been used as a tool to secure and further white patriarchal investments; even knowledge that is meant to dismantle this rule often has a complex relationship with this power.

In *State of White Supremacy: Racism, Governance, and the United States*, Moon-Kie Jung, João H. Costas Vargas, and Eduardo

³⁵ Selena, interview with Daniel Topete, March 24, 2014.

Bonilla-Silva, offer a comprehensive look at the dimensions of white supremacy in the U.S. and the many ways that it continues to stay strong in our society. This book attempts to dispel the notions of the U.S. as a free nation of states; rather it situates the U.S. as an empire-state that has a major stake in conquest, racial-formations, historical distortion, and maintaining notions of white superiority. In particular, this work reflects the ways the U.S. educational system has been used as a tool for assimilation in communities of color.

In their chapter, "The Best Education for Some: Race and Schooling in the United States Today," Amanda E. Lewis and Michelle J. Manno speak to the unequal educational system that favors white Americans. While desegregation laws made it unconstitutional for school segregation, unequal housing practices and uneven economic disparities created a system where segregation is more prominent now than ever before. They state, "This enduring legacy includes powerful social seniority accrued in previously segregated employment sectors, and alumni status (which provides advantage to offspring as "legacy admits") at previously all-white colleges and universities."³⁶ This legacy has ensured a clear passage for those privileged on the backs of those not deemed worthy of such status.

³⁶ Moon Kie Jung, João H. Costas Vargas, and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva ed. *State of White Supremacy: Racism, Governance, and the United States* (California: Stanford University Press, 2011), 93.

By creating unequal systems of law, citizenship, education, and race, white Americans have ensured their dominance and stronghold in the U.S. and their subjugated territories. In turn, this stronghold has created an educational system that teaches people of color to aspire to whiteness as it is often equated to success. As those that are allowed in higher education continue the assimilation process, they are engulfed in a system of dependence, even if they are fully conscious of the hypocrisy, injustice, and inequality that exist.

Through this dedication to the "unbiased" and to "scientific proof," the U.S. has been able to secure their foothold of white supremacy on people of color. Through a eugenicist thought process, attempts have been made to "scientifically" suggest that white is simply biologically superior. While overt claims of white supremacy have fallen out of favor, covert unconscious and self-righteous forms of racism still exist. This type of knowledge created by and for the white race is embedded in the logic of this society, from social services, to schools, to politics.

In their book *White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology*, Tukufu Zuberi and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva describe the ways that "white logic" is used to secure and advance white supremacy in academia. Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva define "white logic" as "...a context in which white supremacy has defined the techniques and processes of reasoning about social facts. White

logic assumes a historical posture that grants eternal objectivity to the views of elite whites and condemns the views of non-whites to perpetual subjectivity.”³⁷

This eternal objectivity has placed whites in this society in an undisputable position of power that they have based as “scientific proof.” Those that attempt to step out of the realm of these given “scientific facts” do so fully knowing that they go against the cannon of not just scholarly disciplines but of a society that is based on these logics. Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva continue with their definition of white methods as:

White methods are the various practices that have been used to produce ‘racial knowledge’ since the emergence of white supremacy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and of the disciplines a few centuries later. These practices remain connected to white logic and, as such, cannot be easily divorced, no matter what their practitioners murmur or shout vociferously, from racial domination.³⁸

These practices have enabled the construction of an American nation laced in mythology and deceit. These myths, presented as “empirical data,” justify a history of culture eradication in the name of progress that continues today. From the negation of language and culture to the over representation of white teachers in communities of color, it becomes clear that student success is tied to investments in whiteness.

³⁷ Tukufu Zuberi, and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, eds. *White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 17.

³⁸ Zuberi, Tukufu and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, eds., 18-19.

"Cuentame me tu Vida:"³⁹ My fight against assimilation

Growing up in the Los Angeles public school systems, most of my teachers were white. The very few teachers who were people of color were for classes like Spanish or dual-emergence courses. Looking back, I realize that my education was not about knowledge but assimilation into white society. By completing my K-12 education and receiving a high school diploma indicated that I was an acceptable member of society as long as I continue to obey notions of white superiority.

One day we were assigned to find a career or field of study and university we would want to attend. I had no idea what that meant, and I knew that I did not want to be a doctor, teacher, architect, businessperson, or any of the sanctioned careers that are glossed over by teachers. Reflecting on my predicament with a friend who was attending Rio Hondo Community College at the time and knowing that I was obsessed with Mexica culture and rock en Español, he suggested that I should look into Chicano Studies. I had no idea what he had said but was intrigued by the fact that he used Chicano and Studies in the same sentence. Shortly after he took me to UCLA to meet a person who was majoring in Chicano Studies and began to tell me things they spoke of in the classroom. Needless to say, I was sold. As I got back to high school with a new sense of purpose and focus I finished that career project and decided that I would go to California State

³⁹ Caifanes. "Cuentame tu vida," (Tell me your life) *Caifanes* (RCA International, 1988).

University, Los Angeles, because according to my counselor there was no way that I could get into UCLA and major in Chicano Studies. Here I began to be the polite little Mexican student that the white teachers needed me to be in order to pass my classes and I began to master the art of insincerity. While I felt like I was selling myself out, a *vendido* for a grade, I had hopes that college would be more reflective of my Chicano identity. This negotiation made me feel like I needed to sacrifice my need to express my developing cultural identity for the possibility of success.

In her chapter "Domesticana: the Sensibility of Chicana Rasquachismo," Amalia Mesa-Bains describes the ways Chicana/o artists maneuvered through systems of oppression through a *rasquache* identity.

Rasquachismo can thus be seen as a redemptive sensibility linked to a broad-based cultural movement among Chicanos. As the first generation of their community to be educated in universities (after hard-fought battles in the civil rights period), these artists employed a bicultural sensibility. Operating as an internally colonized community within the borders of the United States, Chicanos forged a new cultural vocabulary composed of sustaining elements of Mexican tradition and lived encounters in a hostile environment.⁴⁰

This *rasquache* identity allows for many Chicanas/os to work with the situations that they have and attempt to create survival strategies. In my interview with Ignacio we spoke about the ways

⁴⁰ Amalia Mesa-Bains, *Domesticana: the Sensibility of Chicana Rasquachismo in Chicana Feminisms: A Critical Reader* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 301.

second generation Chicanos begin to understand their cultural identity in the U.S.

I see myself as Mexican-American, I have a connection to my roots. I feel like I am more American than I am Mexican because I have been here longer. My way of life would be a lot different for me in Mexico.

Q- Then how do you see your American identity?

No, in that sense I feel Mexican. I feel like a Mexican that speaks really good Spanish. Like a Mexican that went to school and did everything that they had to, you know. Like all the processes that they put us through, I did all that and I am still Mexican down to the job that I have. The American is more of a label to fit in I guess. I guess it's just to identify the difference between a *paisa* and me. Well I mean, I'm not *paisa* but I'm not a white boy, you know.⁴¹

As a construction worker, Ignacio feels that his identity in between these two worlds allows him advantages that many non-English speaking people do not have. By speaking Spanish with his co-workers, Ignacio is "sustaining elements of Mexican tradition" as Mesa-Baines describes, but navigating a "hostile environment" by speaking English to the white bosses. For Chicanas/os like Ignacio "that went to school and did everything that they had to," it is often still not enough to succeed in ways that U.S. meritocratic narratives frame it. Chicanas/os have to excel in various areas to be noticed by teachers, counselors, and administrators. Even students like Ignacio who excelled at sports and had a grade point average higher than 3.5, did not receive any guidance from counselors or teachers to continue his

⁴¹ Ignacio, interviewed by Daniel Topete, March 24, 2014.

education; the only reason he took the SAT's was because a friend told him to take them with him.

Similar to Ignacio, I was not guided to college. I soon learned that I would not be able to attend Cal State L.A., but worse I was in danger of not graduating high school. Given the impression by my counselors that I was on track and ready to graduate, I continued my part time job selling leather jackets in Huntington Park's "la Pacific." While I cannot completely blame this mismanagement on the counselors, it does speak to the blind trust that is given to school administrators by people of color. It also speaks to my personal experience and the history of distrust that second generation Chicanas/os develop for these school systems. With all these feelings of distrust and betrayal felt toward a system that I thought had my best interests, I had to look towards my home to find the inspiration to graduate. Seeing my mother carry the load of raising a family with three jobs put into perspective the struggle and sacrifice that thousands of migrants go through on a daily basis. In comparison, my feelings of identity negotiations and system betrayal became almost selfish, and to this day when times get tough and I have thoughts of quitting, I think of the strength I inherited from my mother to continue the fight. This inherited resiliency becomes a crucial part of not only surviving in the barrio, but also in institutions that have historically disenfranchised communities of color.

In her article "Learning and living pedagogies of the home: the mestiza consciousness of Chicana Students," Dolores Delgado Bernal speaks to the ways that Chicanas use the knowledge's learned from home to survive in spaces of higher education.

It is through culturally specific ways of teaching and learning that ancestors and elders share the knowledge of conquest, segregation, labor market stratification, patriarchy, homophobia, assimilation, and resistance. This knowledge that is passed from one generation to the next—often by mothers and other female members—can help us survive in everyday life by providing an understanding of certain situations and explanations about why things happen under certain conditions.⁴²

While this knowledge may not be validated in an academic setting, this is the knowledge that I take with me every day to overcome the fact that most professors would not think twice about a person like me dropping out. When I have doubts, begin to question my intelligence and belonging in graduate school, I have to remind myself that it is no accident that I am in a doctoral program. People of color like myself do not simply slip through the cracks of the application process. This was made clear to me when I was rejected by all the schools to which I applied, and as I reapplied the following year. While I was lucky enough to teach the year I was rejected, I had to constantly remind myself of that strength and determination that people like my mother had to

⁴² Dolores Delgado Bernal, "Learning an living pedagogies of the home: the mestiza consciousness of Chicana Students" (International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education Vol. 14, No. 5, 1990), 624-625.

endure in making a life in a country that only wants their cheap labor.

This "Pedagogy of Home" continued with me throughout my doctoral coursework when "interdisciplinary" professors felt uncomfortable with a Chicana/o Studies analysis. For many people of color Ethnic Studies courses become a space where they are able to see their identity, culture, and language reflected. For Corina, entering a Chicano Studies classroom became a moment to reclaim a culture that was denied to her throughout her education.

It was definitely the empowerment that I got from Chicano Studies classes, it was definitely that... and it was a validation to know that I had something to be proud of and that my people were really amazing and had done amazing things, that they had a history and even though I wasn't taught that history in school, that there was a history and to excavate it and to bring it to the surface was revolutionary because people didn't want us to know it and didn't want us be proud of it and didn't want us teach it to somebody else, to like another kid. So, I think that was part of my change that I could be proud and could share it. It was definitely a validation that I got from the classes. It felt really amazing to be able to share with my mom and dad, and my brothers and sister, because I knew that they were going through the same school system that I did. So I was able to share things with them along the way, so they had the consciousness planted early, whether they wanted to do anything with it was up to them, but I had to share it. It felt like it was something that was hidden from me that I had to share with everybody. I needed to show it off because it had been denied from me for a long time.⁴³

Coming from an interdisciplinary field like Chicano Studies, students like Corina become accustomed to scholarship

⁴³ Corina. Interview with Daniel Topete, November 11, 2014.

that values culture, other languages, and community voices that have traditionally been silenced in academia. Having this connection can bring a renewed sense of joy and love to learning for many Chicanas/os. Being able to connect home and academia allows Chicanas/os to see community members as knowledge producers that have historically been marginalized in mainstream America. In this way, Chicana/o Studies and Ethnic Studies scholarship allows for spaces to create non-normative forms of knowledge that can challenge their role in U.S. mainstream culture. By accepting non-mainstream music, art, and scholarship Chicanas/os begin to see themselves as knowledge producers.

As it becomes more difficult for students of color to engage with their education with the erasure of ethnic studies programs throughout the country, it becomes crucial to create spaces where these students can see themselves reflected. In times of crisis the U.S. focuses their aim toward people of color and any programs that facilitate their existence in this country. In her book, *Barrio Dreams: Puerto Ricans, Latinos, and the Neoliberal City*, Arlene Dávila documents a history of struggle for education rights for Black and Latino Youth in East Harlem that have historically been denied equal access to schooling.

The struggle was part of larger demands for educational equity, mainly in Latino and other minority communities. In East Harlem, the fight was primarily about cultural empowerment for Black and Latino children who were considered faulty and ignorant by virtue of their race, class, or language. These struggles led to the hiring of Black and Latino teachers and administrative staff to

bilingual and culturally tailored programs as well as to parent involvement and community control in schools administration, which in turn led to the creation of the local school boards.⁴⁴

While many have claimed these tactics as exclusionary and the schools of teaching subversion, the fact is that these schools are tailored for youth of color amidst an environment that has geared them towards failure. Through the creation of charter schools that tailor to the needs of the communities where they are located, students of color are allowed the opportunity to engage with their histories, language, and culture that is often denied in U.S. public schools.

Students of color need to see their stories, languages, and culture alive in their education in order to succeed. These students need to feel like they are valued for who they are and not dehumanized due to preconceived understandings by teachers and administrators. In her chapter "Cartohistografía: Continente de una voz" Elba Rosario Sánchez speaks to the need to feel reflected in the knowledge forced on her.

I wanted to read about the everyday life of other young Mexicanas, Chicanas- others like me who live between, entre culturas, languages y lenguas, friends, families, worlds. I wanted and needed to write as a way to fill the void of voices that didn't speak to my experience.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Arlene Dávila, *Barrio Dreams: Puerto Ricans, Latinos, and the Neoliberal City* (California; University of California Press, 2004), 142.

⁴⁵ Elba R. Sánchez, "Cartohistografía: Continente de una voz, Cartohistography: One Voice's Continent" in *Chicana Feminisms: A Critical Reader* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 19-20.

Similar to Sánchez the need to see my cultural identity reflected in my education had to be done in creative ways. Through my own search for books, music, and cultural expressions that reflected my identity, I was able to create a hunger for knowledge that was not a part of the "American" dream that had been engrained in me since kindergarten. Soon after this newfound identity became visible in way of dress, speech, and attitude, I realized my critical lens towards U.S. society was not accepted as a part of my successful career path. While it was clear that this new sense of agency was not going to help me in the classroom, it did allow me the opportunity to start developing the ability to name the violence that I felt against me.

Conclusion:

This new sense of agency allowed me to write poetry, sing, and begin to find a voice that was a source of shame to me before. Listening to *rock en Español* reminded me that my first language was poetic and beautiful, that I could begin developing a Chicano identity that spoke to my lived experience in this country. While this new voice would constantly get me into trouble, it also gave me a new sense of my identity that was stronger and more secure. The person whose culture, language, and identity was taken away was insecure and unsure about his future. With a new voice developing that did not accept the negative stereotypes of who I was told I was, I was able to find my own determination to succeed. Sánchez states,

My tongue names injustices I witness, a veces en voz de poeta, a veces en mi native lengua pocha, from my pocha perspective. Sometimes I use my university-trained and degreed tongue, when it is necessary. My lengua recuenta en color y olor de carne propia. It is my tongue that boldly translates those injustices in English, para que entiendan los que no las viven y los que por miopes no las ven. Mi lengua es un órgano vital. It is a gift, my power.⁴⁶

While I did not have the words to articulate the injustices that I felt outside of those classrooms, I never forgot what it felt like to not have your *lengua* and culture valued in those spaces. That memory has allowed me to create an identity that will constantly fight for the right to exist in spaces like academia. This memory continues to show me how to survive and maneuver through these spaces and still feel intact at the end.

Often to exist in these spaces means that people of color must completely conform to the hegemonic standards of this society. So the ability to negotiate this conformity is often necessary in order to stay complete. In her book *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Chela Sandoval describes how "oppositional consciousness" allows for the ability to control the level of participation with power.

I think of this activity of consciousness as the "differential," insofar as it enables movement "between and among" ideological positioning (the equal-rights, revolutionary, supremacist, and separatist modes of oppositional consciousness) considered as variables, in order to disclose the distinctions among them. In this sense, the differential mode of consciousness functions like the clutch of an automobile, the mechanism that

⁴⁶ Sánchez, Elba R. (25)

permits the driver to select, engage, and disengage gears in a system for the transmission of power.⁴⁷

The ability to engage or disengage is crucial to the survival of people of color in spaces like academia. Often is the case that we must choose our battles in order to keep some level of sanity. Spaces like academia where people of color are so under represented, can take a toll on the physical, mental, and spiritual well being as they are often expected to carry the weight of "diversity."

As I recall my path toward higher education it makes me consider both the positive and negative impacts on my identity formation as a Chicano in the U.S. Having never been the best student I had to struggle to find a voice in academia. These struggles have allowed me to reflect on the unequal access to education for communities of color. This reflection has guided my scholarship, activism, and identity formation in a country that does not want to see me succeed on my own terms. As I continue to learn how to maneuver through conflicted spaces, I know that my struggle will guide my path. In his book *Pedagogies of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire speaks of education as a form of liberation instead of a practice of subservience to power.

Education as the practice of freedom-as opposed to education as the practice of domination-denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as

⁴⁷ Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minnesota; University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 57.

a reality apart from people. Authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without people, but people in their relations with the world.⁴⁸

Education should allow for personal growth and for the ability to engage with knowledge production. Having a voice in and outside of academic walls is crucial for Chicanas/os to create "their own relations to the world." Education that only exists to uphold and advance white knowledge and power simply does not work for many people of color. For this reason, it is crucial that people of color fight the defunding and delegitimization of Ethnic Studies programs.

This chapter focused on the ways that the U.S. public school system is more dedicated to an assimilation project than actual education. Only those who fully accept American exceptionalism doctrine are seen as having a successful future, and even then not everyone is allowed to "succeed." Through survival techniques this chapter reflects on possible ways to combat total cultural loss in a country that does not value people of color. Through personal narratives, ethnographies, and memory of active struggle this chapter engaged with literature that speaks to the constant struggle that people of color endure in their desire for equal access to education.

⁴⁸ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York; The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 1970), 81.

*The abuse of power threw us into the abyss from which many of us would never be able to emerge. We found a refuge there, a unique corner where it was just ourselves and our loneliness. A space forgotten by society and protected by angels. It taught us that marginalization has its own powerful side, covered with light, possessing what the other side lacks: dignity. That smelly gutter would be our home, and repression our mentor. It was there that survival developed its own world, and intimate language, a heartrending scream that fought for the right to exist.*⁴⁹ -Saúl Hernández

*"Vienes caminando ignorando sagrados ritos, pisoteando sabios templos de amor espiritual."*⁵⁰-Caifanes

Chapter 3

"Nunca Me Voy A Transformar En Ti":

Negotiations of Mexican Nationalism in Chicana/Chicano Identity

Coming of age in the late 1980s and early '90s in my barrio, it was difficult not to get involved in gangs. There were certain markers that identified you as a *Chola/o* (gangster), musical taste being one of them. The oldies but goodies and the emergence of gangster rap were certainly among those markers. I occasionally enjoyed sneaking some oldies or some NWA past my dad but that music never really captured my attention; probably because of the fear of the *fajo* (the belt). Still, as most of my neighborhood friends showed off their baggy pants, canvas belt with an Old English letter, and some Nike Cortes', it became something that I wanted too. In junior high, the only step I needed to take to be mistaken as a *cholo* was a baldhead. In fact,

⁴⁹ Ernesto Lechner. *Rock en Español: The Latin Alternative Rock Explosion* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2006), vii-viii.

⁵⁰ Caifanes, *Aquí no es Así*. *El Nervio del Volcan* (Sony U.S. Latin, 1994). It is not like that here. Translated by author.

my friends and I thought it would be a great idea to start a crew at school that by appearance resembled a mini-gang. We tagged, we jumped in new recruits, and discovered a newfound love for oldies. It wasn't until a local gang waited for us after school and put us in our place that resulted in many of us either joining a real gang or leaving that lifestyle all together.

My epiphany came in the form of California's Proposition 187 walkouts. I began to question my Mexican, American, and Mexican American identities that day as many of my friends jumped over fences, were suspended, and were told to go back to Mexico by their teachers for protesting. My protest did not come in the form of jumping fences that day, but it did spark a critical thought in me that I am still trying to nurture today.

In response to anti-immigrant sentiments and bills passed in California in the 1990s, many Chicanas/os began to use Spanish music as a form of resistance and rebellion to mainstream American narratives. Bills like California's Proposition 187 (1994) that attempted to deny social services to migrants and their children, and Proposition 227 (1998) that attempted to end bilingual education, created an environment that criminalized many Spanish speaking communities. While these laws applied to many migrant communities, the commercial campaigns in California made it clear that Latina/os were the problem. This moment marked a transition for many young Chicanas/os who began to challenge narratives that labeled them as "at-risk," and "criminal." This

challenge came in the form of Spanish music for many, as cities across the American Southwest and throughout the country saw a rise in the popularity in what the media labeled as the "Latin Explosion."⁵¹

For a teenager growing up in the U.S. constantly being reminded that my culture and language were not acceptable, the rebellious act of listening to Spanish music made it clear that we were questioning and challenging our very identities. Although most of the music that I would listen to at this time was in English, the fact that I was listening to some lyrics in Spanish made me feel like I was doing something rebellious. In this way, waving of Mexican flags and listening to *rock en Español* has less to do with national loyalties, but becomes a symbol accessed by Chicanas/os to protest racist policies. This music allowed me to use a language that I only used to communicate with my parents and that had frankly become a point of shame because I considered it un-American, as it was clear that I could not speak it in many other spaces. While much of the *rock en Español*⁵² that I was listening to at this time did not explicitly have politicized lyrics, the small references were enough for me to begin to question my position as a Chicano in the U.S. Josh Kun describes how *rock en Español* was able connect people to common political concerns:

⁵¹ Agustin Gurza, "1999 was the year of the Latin Explosion. Ricky. Enrique. J. Lo. But the high-gloss boom went bust—with lessons for the next wave," (Los Angeles Times, August 15, 2004).

⁵² *Rock en español* translates to Spanish language rock music.

"But it is not only the hybridity of *rock en Español* that provides the aural crossroads between Mexico and the United States (that both *Pretty Vacant* and *Star Maps* make evident) but the common political concerns that much of the music most frequently is used to address: the state-sanctioned U.S. racism and nativist U.S. immigration policy that hold dire consequences for Chicanos/as and Mexicanos/as alike."⁵³

These *rock en Español* spaces began my search for a Chicano identity that I felt reflected my lived experiences and that was denied to me growing up. The "hybridity" of *rock en Español* expressed the complicated notions of Chicana/o identity that would never be "truly" Mexican or "truly" American. This hybridity allowed me to complicate conventional narratives about Mexican-American communities on both sides of the border, and was able to create my own understanding of American identity, Mexican identity, spiritual practices, social activism, and finally Chicana/o identity.

These experiences made me want to explore how musical spaces created by groups like Caifanes/Jaguares allowed for a critical space to question mainstream U.S. narratives regarding Chicana/o populations by offering alternative notions of Mexican nationalism. It encouraged, rather than discouraged the use of Spanish in public spaces. This move from private to public expression was clearly anti-assimilationist. It was also a counter-narrative to the same imposed on us as immigrants.

Mexican nationalism is relevant to or useful for articulating the ideology outlined by José Vasconcelos in his

⁵³ Josh Kun, *Audiotopia: Music, Race and America* (Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press, 2005), 197.

book *Cosmic Race*. Widespread articulations of Mexican nationalism have been influenced by Vasconcelos' work on intermixing that continue to this day, because of his role as the Minister of Education in Mexico in the early nineteenth century. "Thus it can readily be stated that the mixture of similar races is productive, while the mixture of very distant types, as in the case of Spaniards and American Indians, has questionable results.. Due to the exclusion of Spaniards decreed after independence, the mixing of races was interrupted before the racial type was completely finished."⁵⁴ This mixture, referred to as *mestizaje*, became a prominent marker for Mexican nationalism. Its emphasis on Spanish lineage becomes the defining element for a Mexican national/citizen and it favors those who can trace or resemble that lineage. Creating this notion of *mestizaje*, the Mexican state continues a long history of indigenous genocide and only incorporates indigeneity at a superficial level. By only incorporating indigeneity as a romantic gesture to Mexican native roots, the state makes clear their investment in whiteness and its Spanish heritage.

I argue that Caifanes/Jaguars are complicating this notion of the Cosmic Race, by engaging with third space⁵⁵ identities that speak to lived experiences and international human rights movements, instead of singular or binary identity politics. For many Chicanas/os who were forced to lose their native tongue and

⁵⁴ José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race: A Bilingual Edition* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997) 5.

⁵⁵ See Chela Sandoval *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 2000.

culture in the U.S. assimilation process, *rock en Español* facilitates the creation of a third space identity that reflects a “*ni de aqui, ni de alla*” sensibility. *Rock en Español*, as a third space, continues a tradition initiated by U.S. third world feminists who articulated that a “third space can be understood as a location and/or practice. As a practice it reveals a differential consciousness capable of engaging creative and coalitional forms of opposition to the limits of dichotomous (mis)representations. As a location, third space has the potential to be a space of shared understanding and meaning-making.”⁵⁶ In particular, the music of *rock en Español* groups like *Caifanes* and *Jaguares* allow Chicanas/os to begin to deconstruct and consider alternatives for simple binary national identity markers (Mexican/American/Mexican-American). For example, for many Chicanas’/os’ social and political identity consists of a rejection of an “American” identity and a romanticized, engaging with notions like *La Raza Cosmica*, understanding of their Mexican ancestry. Media representations of the band allow for dialogues that consider an exploration of a more nuanced identity formation for Chicanas/os in U.S. society. I argue that this transnational identity creates a third space that allows Chicanas/os the opportunity to question their participation in the Americanization process by complicating “authentic” identity

⁵⁶ Adela C. Licona, “(B)orderlands’ Rhetorics and Representations: The Transformative Potential of Feminist Third-Space Scholarship and Zines” (*NWSA Journal*, Vol. 17 No. 2, Summer 2005).

markers understood as, American, Mexican, Mexican-American, and Chicana/o.

I focus here on the influences that rock en *Español* has on Chicanas/os growing up in the U.S. I argue that Chicana/o fans of *Caifanes/Jaguares* are creating and engaging with identities that helps them to survive mentally, spiritually, and physically in a liminal homeland.⁵⁷ I contend that *rock en Español* groups are creating third space discourses that complicate Chicanas'/os' understanding of Mexican identity that influences their lived experience in the U.S., by engaging in a transnational dialogue about the realities of Mexican life. This dialogue allows many to question their understanding of Mexican nationalism from the U.S., and encourages a cultural nationalism that is not necessarily tied to borders, politics, or social movements. Cultural Mexican nationalist discourses present in the bands' media representations facilitate a new relationship between Chicanas/os and their liminal homeland. Understanding how *Caifanes/Jaguares* are presented in the media in the U.S. and Mexico will ground this research towards the bands importance with combating issues of nationalism, identity, and politics.

The term transnationalism means a fluid, always changing identity that is rooted in what Anzaldúa calls "entre dos mundos,

⁵⁷ Karen Mary Davalos explains that, "Mexicans live in diaspora because they experience both the absence and presence of homeland" See *Exhibiting Mestizaje Mexican (American) Museums in Diaspora* Pg. 24.

tres, cuatro, me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.”⁵⁸ While many can see this transnational identity as contradictory or inauthentic, the dynamic influences that many Chicanas/os experience in the barrio allows them to survive in a country that constantly places them as second-class citizens.⁵⁹ In her book *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa states,

In a constant state of nepantlism, a Nahuatl word meaning torn between ways, *la mestiza* is a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another. Being tricultural, monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual, speaking a patois, and in a state of perpetual transition, the *mestiza* faces the dilemma of the mixed breed: which collectivity does the daughter of a darkskinned mother listen to?⁶⁰

The constant pressures of having to assimilate and to be “successful”⁶¹ in American society, while staying true to your own culture, can be a contradictory act. Growing up in a culture that preaches American exceptionalism, Chicanas/os in the U.S. are reminded everyday that their culture is inferior. While *rock en Español* is not directly creating spaces of resistance, Chicanas/os who engage with this music are challenging nativist

⁵⁸ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Third Ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007), 99. Translation: between two worlds, three, four, my head spins with contradiction.

⁵⁹ Chicanas/Chicanos have historically been a people that regardless of formal citizenship status, have been cast as “outsiders” on their own land. (i.e. Repatriation of Mexican-Americans in the 1930s and current Anti-immigrant bills in Georgia and Arizona.) Also see Mae M. Ngai’s *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, 2004.

⁶⁰ Gloria Anzaldúa, 100.

⁶¹ Emphasis on word successful is to discuss how success in the U.S. is subjective and does not apply to all people of color. In fact, this dissertation will argue that success in the U.S. context is unattainable because of race, language, and culture.

narratives about their language and expressing a public identity that is proud.

Through an analysis of various newspapers in the U.S. and Mexico, it is important to look at the ways that *rock en Español* groups *Caifanes* and *Jaguares*, as well as the lead singer of both groups Saúl Hernández, are represented on both sides of the border. The groups' Mexican nationalism is presented in newspapers and magazines regionally and internationally. An internet search of the group's *Caifanes* and *Jaguares* on the online database Ethnic Newswatch, provided forty-four newspaper articles that mentioned the group and/or the lead singer. Three themes arose in the forty-four articles that were reviewed. These provide evidence showing how Mexican nationalism is complicated for Chicanas/os in the U.S. Significant themes as follows: participation in social activism; spirituality; and Mexican nationalism. These have guided a discussion of the importance that *Caifanes* and *Jaguares* have had in informing and complicating Mexican nationalism for Chicanas/os in the U.S. While many Chicanas/os will complicate American nationalism and identity because of the complex relationship between citizenship and belonging, this may not be as critical as complicating notions of Mexican nationalism and identity. Due to the complex relationship with Mexican nationalistic sentiments, many Chicanas/os may not be as critical of their connection with the Mexican state while living abroad because of a need to remain connected to "home," in the same way that first generation migrants may not be as

critical of the U.S. (discussed further in chapter 4.) This does not mean that either Chicanas/os or first generation migrants support violent power structures, but rather are employing survival strategies to create better living conditions.

As transnational citizens of Mexico, many Chicanas/os in the U.S. imagine a homeland that has to be better than their current situations. While this imagined homeland may differ for first and second generation migrants because of lived experience, I argue that a third space identity created around *rock en Español* creates a working class sensibility that ties communities together. By coming together around the music, first, second, and beyond generation migrants find common quotidian struggles in light of anti-Mexican and anti-immigrant policies in the U.S. Through the themes of social activism, spirituality, and Mexican nationalism, *Caifanes/Jaguares* are facilitating a third space in which Chicanas/os can find agency in a culture they have always had to suppress.

Band(s) Background:

Based out of Mexico City, *Caifanes*, a name given to Mexican *pachucos* or Zoot Suiters, consists of lead singer and composer Saúl Hernández, lead guitarist Alejandro Marcovich, Sabo Romo on bass guitar, Diego Herrera on keyboard and saxophone, and Alfonso André on drums. Their first album "*Mátame Porque Me Muero*" (Kill me Because I am Dying) was released in 1988 after the group played together in local scenes for a year. As a new genre, *rock*

en Español with a British pop sound was not popular in Mexico at the time. However, their incorporation of *Cumbias*, a popular Columbian based music genre, into their hit song "La Negra Tomasa" guided them toward wide popularity throughout Mexico and Latin America.

While their influences mainly derived from post-punk groups like Joy-Division and The Cure, their hit song was an entry point for stardom. Releasing an album approximately every other year, their next album "El Diablito" (Little Devil) contributed to the growing popularity of *rock en Español* in Latin America with their hit song "La Célula Que Explota" (the cell that explodes). As the *Caifanes*, the group released two more albums "El Silencio" (The Silence) in 1992 and "El Nervio del Volcan" (The Nerve of the Volcano) in 1994. At the height of their now worldwide popularity and in the middle of recording "El Nervio del Volcan", tensions grew between the band, and a split resulted with Romo and Marcovich taking the band's name with them.⁶² The trajectory of their discography documents their move from *Caifanes* to *Jaguares*, and their evolving investment in Mexican nationalism.

Continuing with a release every two years, Saúl Hernández and Alfonso André continued to make music under the new name *Jaguares* (Jaguars). Saúl Hernández released "El Equilibrio de Los

⁶² This biographical information regarding the band is information that I have gathered throughout my personal interests in the group that began when I was in high school in the early 1990s. More specific information was gathered from the official band website(s). Please see <http://www.caifanes2011.com/> and <http://www.saul-hernandez.com/>

Jaguares" in 1996. With collaborations with various artist *Jaguares* released albums included, "*Bajo el Azul de Tu Misterio*" (1999), "*Cuando La Sangre Galopa*" (2001), "*Crónicas de un Laberinto*" (2005), and "45" (2008).

Using his influence and popularity among Mexican people throughout the world, Saúl Hernández teamed up with Amnesty International to create the "Justice for the Women of Juarez Benefit Concert," which took place on December 2nd, 2004 in Los Angeles, California. As the name suggests, this concert was created to raise awareness for the hundreds of women who disappeared and have been killed in the Mexico/U.S. border state Juarez since 1993. As many women worked in the *Maquiladoras*, mostly U.S. based companies, the United States was implicated in an issue for which they may have otherwise claimed no responsibility. The benefit concerts were an effort to create funds in order to put pressure on both U.S. and Mexican governments to investigate the killings and create awareness of an urgent issue affecting the citizens of Mexico, as well as those living in the United States. These benefit concerts signaled one of the moments in which a borderlands, third space, or transnational identity was deployed for Chicana/o attendees.

In analyzing the media coverage of *Jaguares* and *Caifanes*, I argue that these representations both contribute to and complicate the conventional understandings of Mexican nationalism for Chicanas/os, because they make a direct critique of the

Mexican state's lack of attention toward working class communities. It further exemplifies that Mexican flag waving at concerts has less to do with nationalistic loyalties, but instead a cultural affirmation beyond governments, religion, and borders. This has actually complicated the significance of Mexican nationalism for Chicanas/os and simultaneously challenges their understanding of their participation in U.S. society and how they negotiate their actual lived experiences.

Spirituality:

Mexican spirituality can be complicated, to say the least. Often associated with Catholicism, Mexican identity for many includes cultural practices that are informed by religion. For example, the uses of patron saints in various town celebrations that are not always sanctioned by the Catholic church. This cultural understanding often includes respect for pre-Columbian customs and traditions, like that of the Curanderas/os (spiritual healers). To this day these healers play an important role in understanding Mexican spirituality and identity for many Chicanas/os in the U.S.

In her article, "The Light That Never Goes Out: Butchlalis de Panochtlitlan Reclaim 'Lesser Los Angeles'," Karen Tongson discusses how Latinas/os in Los Angeles connect to artists reflecting a lived experiences that speaks to their Mexican ancestry and U.S. identities. In focusing on the musician Morrissey, she also shows the relationship between ethnicity and

class in youth cultures actively constructing oppositional subjectivities.

It presupposes a racially coherent, authentic, and self-aware subject that always has 'home' or a diapsoric point of cultural origin as an affective coordinate, while presuming that one national context- Mexico- offers the foundation for a broader Latino/a intersubjective affinity with 'Saint Morrissey' from Manchester, England...Morrissey functions as a reference point because he invokes with his brooding suburban outsiderhood a version of Southern California spiritually significant to a spectrum of queer Latinas and Latinos..⁶³

Although Morrissey is from England, his connection to thousands of second generation Latinas/os speaks to the need for voices that reflect a complicated identity. It may also signal the transcendence of class over race in this generation as a marker of outsidership. Be it through sainthood or magical powers, many alienated Chicanas/os are hungry for this connection.

Many *Caifanes* and *Jaguares* fans, believe that Saúl Hernández has these spiritual powers. For many, his mystical words and lyrics are healing, and are a tribute to an ancient past. In an article for the Chicago Tribune, Ernesto Lechner quotes Lysa Flores, an artist that toured with Hernández, as saying "Saul is more of a shaman or spiritual poet than a rock star."⁶⁴ This understanding of Saúl Hernández as a spiritual

⁶³ Karen Tongson, *Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries*, (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 170.

⁶⁴ Ernesto Lechner, "New album, old spirit invigorate Jaguares," (Chicago Tribune, Nov. 11, 2004, accessed Mar. 2, 2012), Chicago Tribune online database.

leader creates a space for Chicanas/os to articulate their spirituality outside of the realm of organized religion. Often calling his concerts a ceremony, Hernández challenges conventional forms of spirituality and transforms concert venues to ceremonial spaces, as he states in his song "Aqui no es asi," (It is not like that here) "Para una alma eternal, cada piedra es un altar" (For an eternal soul, every rock is an altar).⁶⁵

Jaguares video for their song "Asi Como Tu" depicts images of alters (see Fig. 1) for La Virgen de Guadalupe in a run down bar. In this way, Jaguares are reclaiming a religious icon for the people, much in the same way that Chicanas have done.

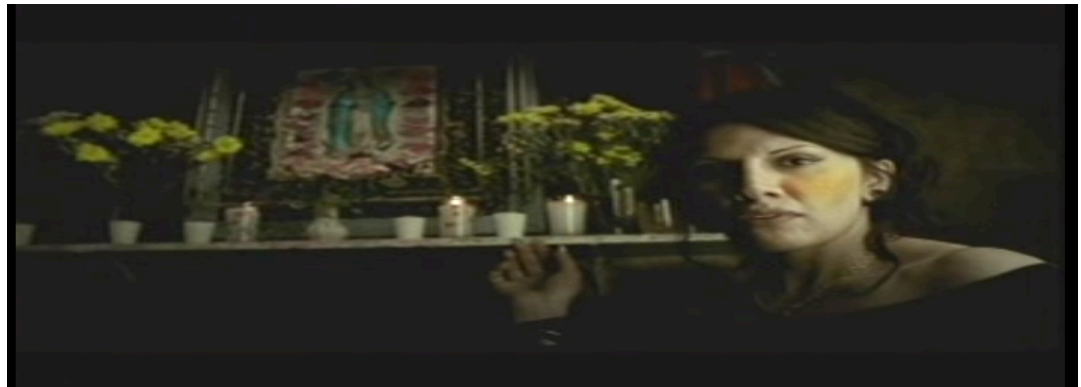


Fig. 2: Jaguares, "Asi Como Tu," Official Video, 2001.

For many Chicanas/os these spaces become a crucial space for spiritual survival. As part of American assimilation, Chicanas/os are forced to question and disengage from their cultural understandings, including religion and spirituality. As many move away from organized religion, *Caifanes* and *Jaguares*

⁶⁵ Caifanes, "Aqui No Es Asi" in *El Nervio del Volcan*, (Sony U.S. Latin, 1994).

fans are complicating spiritual practices by engaging in syncretized forms of Catholicism that are not sanctioned by the church. In the 1992 Caifanes video "No Dejes Que," images of candles, oils, ceramic idols, and various non-denominational spiritual items (see Fig.2), typically found in *botanicas*, are transposed with images of the band and working class people in the streets. Here the band is not only attempting to connect to a spiritual world of *curanderismo* and *espiritismo*, but are simultaneously reminding their audience of their social location and investment toward Mexican working class communities.



Fig. 3: Caifanes, "No Dejes Que," Official Video, 1992.

In a Los Angeles Times interview with Emilio Morales, publisher of *rock en Español* magazine *La Banda Elastica*, he states, "The appeal of the band comes from Saul's stature... He's an icon, a mythic figure among kids. Even though many people don't understand what he means in his lyrics, somehow people find personal meaning, which is weird because you see 13-year-old kids

taking Saul's lyrics as the Bible. I mean, he has that kind of power."⁶⁶ For Chicanas/os who have been denied access to negotiate their own spirituality and voice, a lyric about an ancestral past becomes an entry point to a cultural memory that many know exists but cannot retrieve. For a thirteen-year-old boy quoting Saúl becomes a way to articulate an identity that describes life "entre dos mundos."⁶⁷

This identity facilitates a space for Chicanas/os to negotiate the spiritual dissension from their parent's understanding of religion, and give god-like qualities to images, words, or people that better reflect their lived experiences. By incorporating indigenous spiritual traditions into cultural catholic practices, Chicanas/os are still able to participate in traditional holidays and ceremonies without feeling conflicted. Here they are able to attend Catholic mass with their parents in the morning and attend a ceremonial *Caifanes* or *Jaguares* concert at night.

In a description of a sold out *Caifanes* concert in 2011, Manuel Tejada of the Mexican newspaper *Reforma*, states "*Por ultimo,*" "*No Dejes Que*" *unió en una sola voz a las 20 mil almas congregadas que vieron favorecida su entrega cuando, a las 23:30 horas, los cinco ídolos bajaron de su altar para interactuar con*

⁶⁶ Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez, "Jaguares Go on the Prowl," (Los Angeles Times, Feb. 13, 2000), accessed Mar. 2, 2012 from Los Angeles Times online database.

⁶⁷ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Third Ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007), 99.

*los seguidores de las primeras filas.”*⁶⁸ (At last, “*No Dejes Que*” (Don’t let it be) united twenty thousand congregated souls in one voice, that when they saw favored in their dedication, when at 23:30 hours, the five idols came down from their altar to interact with their followers of the first row). In this article Tejada begins to describe the power and message that many Chicanas/os experience during a *Caifanes* or *Jaguares* concert, as he recounts the scene in a very ceremonial manner.

This type of response was very typical in the newspapers and articles written about the group on both sides of the border. Having this very emotional response to the space, speaks to the need for a spiritual connection that reflects the lived experience of Mexicanas/os and Chicanas/os. Hernandez offers an understanding of spirituality that speaks to an indigenous Mexican past, cultural Catholicism, along with civil and human rights.

Mexican Nationalism:

For many second-generation Chicanas/os a connection to Mexican national identity is constructed from the outside. In transnational cities like Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, etc., second-generation migrants are able to engage in nationalistic identities that while different from those who actually live in

⁶⁸ Manuel Tejada, “Se arrodilla Saúl Hernández ante entrega de sus fans,” (*Reforma*, Mexico City, Oct. 3, 2011), accessed Apr. 8, 2012, Ethnic News Watch.

Mexico, nevertheless speak to the experiences of living in the margins. I argue that through social engagement in spaces like *La Placita Olvera* in Los Angeles or the Pilsen area of Chicago Chicanas/os are constructing a romanticized understanding of Mexico (discussed further in chapter 3.) While there have been critiques that these understandings of Mexican nationalism are inaccurate or that they are to be consumed under capitalistic control, this dissertation makes the claim that Chicanas/os are nevertheless reclaiming these spaces. Chicanas/os have used them as symbolic substitutes for home. They may be meant to be consumed by the exotic other, although Chicanas/os may participate in this romanticized understanding of Mexican nationalism, I argue that because of the intersectional nature of their social location in the U.S. they engage with these romantic narratives to disengage from the criminalization and alienation that they face everyday. As the band complicates binary narratives of identity, Chicanas/os are able to challenge their own identity politics in the U.S. and are able to express the dynamic nature of their lived experiences. In this way, Caifanes and Jaguares create a space for Chicanas/os to explore and practice this transnational form of Mexican identity within the U.S.

An article by EFE News Service speaks to a transnational connection that Hernández has with fans outside of Mexico, "The singer-songwriter, also known for his social messages, did not forget Mexicans living in the United States, to whom he dedicated

"*Sera Mañana*" (It Will Be Tomorrow), a song about what one suffers living far from home..."⁶⁹ Hernandez recognizes the differences and difficulties of living abroad from their home countries for first-generation migrants, and at the same time second-generation Chicanas/os can connect to the message in their own way. While Chicanas/os may have privileges that first-generation migrants do not have, the criminalizing of their Mexican heritage in the U.S. is experienced in very similar ways. In this way, a connection to Mexico as a symbol of resistance to U.S. anti-immigrant sentiments is displayed in very similar ways across generations.

Hernandez's music video to his song "Fuerte," displays images of protests that could be in any Mexican or U.S. city (see Fig.3 below.) This form of Mexican nationalism is calling for activism that challenges state power on both sides of the border. Here the Mexican flag transcends governments and calls for a national identity that is tied to the image of the flag being a representation of an ancestral past through the image of the eagle eating the serpent. Here the image on the Mexican flag of the eagle eating the serpent represents the Mexica or Aztec peoples journey to central Mexico in search of a homeland. Chicanas/os are thus reclaiming this image as a symbol of survival and resistance in response to the violence perpetrated on their cultural heritage.

⁶⁹ "Singer Saúl Hernandez kicks off tour as soloist; ENTERTAINMENT-MUSIC," (EFE News Service, Madrid, Spain, Jun. 13, 2011), accessed Apr. 8, 2012, Ethnic News Watch.



Fig.4. Saúl Hernandez, "Fuerte," Official Video, 2014.

In the video "Fuerte," Hernandez flashes scenes of social activism, close-ups of working class people in the street and subway, along with pre-Columbian images. These scenes are a clear representation of Hernandez's investment in creating pride for a Mexican ancestral past (see Fig. 4 below.) Here these activists are finding *fuerza* (strength) with their connection to their indigenous heritage. For Chicanas/os a connection to indigeneity can create a deeper sense of pride as they negotiate their own relationship with Mexican nationalism. Mexican indigeneity for Chicanas/os in an urban setting has become a way to find a sense of belonging and to combat anti-immigrant sentiments in marches and rallies with *Danzantes*; as seen in the "Fuerte" video. Placing himself among the activists, Hernandez becomes but a representative of the people and gives voice to the voiceless through his microphone.



Fig.5. Saúl Hernandez, "Fuerte," Official Video, 2014.

In an interview with Los Angeles based Spanish newspaper *La Opinión*, Hernández speaks to his connection to Mexico when writing songs,

*Pensé en México. Me preguntaba ¿Qué está pasando? Pero con la intención de superar la crítica y comentar los pasos que me provocaría reflexionar para cambiar y comparto lo que pienso en esas canciones, aunque finalmente no soy líder de opinion, ni político, ni sociólogo sino un ciudadano más que comparte su punto de vista.*⁷⁰ (I thought of Mexico. I asked myself, "What is happening?" but with the intention to better the critique, and think of the steps that provoked me to reflect on change and share my thoughts in those songs, although in the end I am not a leader of opinion, nor a politician, nor a sociologist, just a citizen that shares his point of view).

In this way Hernandez is making his position in society clear, as he raises questions, engages in conversations, and demands action from governments as a citizen of the world. As he

⁷⁰ Lucero Amador-Miranda, "Saúl Hernández," (*La Opinión*, Los Angeles, CA., Jul. 7, 2011), accessed Apr. 8, 2012, Ethnic News Watch. Translation by author.

makes clear that he is not a politician, leader, or sociologist, but simply a citizen, he also calling for action from his fan base that places him on a pedestal. His investment in raising awareness of Mexico to a U.S. audience challenges romantic nationalistic narratives. As he reflects about the change that needs to happen in his country, he is also asking Chicanas/os to be a part of that movement. Hernandez's commitment to create consciousness around a Mexican identity is constructed beyond the notion of borders, as he calls for movements that challenge systems of power including his own government. His concerts then become a place to both inspire a strong Mexican identity and to challenge governmental powers.

In an article for Mexican based newspaper *El Norte*, writer América Salinas describes a *Caifanes* concert in Las Vegas to celebrate Mexican Independence Day. She quotes Hernández, "*México está herido, raza, pero sigue de pie, así como tú,*" and continues "*Que esta noche sirva para recordarte que eres libre, no importa el suelo que pises.*"⁷¹ (Mexico is injured Mexican people, but it continues on its feet, just like you... let this night serve as a reminder that you are free no matter what ground you step on). Hernandez speaks to a population that has endured violence on both sides of the border, and gives messages of empowerment and

⁷¹ América Salinas, "'Mexico está herido'," (El Norte, Monterrey, MX., Sep. 18, 2011), accessed Apr. 8, 2012, Ethnic News Watch. Translation by author.

agency. In spite of anti-immigrant sentiments, narratives, and laws that criminalize Chicanas/os in the U.S., these messages of hope and empowerment create a space that validates the experience of racism and discrimination that Latinas/os endure. This sense of empowerment and agency then becomes a part of Chicana/o Mexican national identity that translates to social and activist movements.

Activism:

In the change from *Caifanes* to *Jaguares* in 1996 there was a visible shift in investment of activist narratives in lyrics, political concert dialogue, and a rise in benefit shows. Although this dissertation makes the claim that these groups have always been invested in creating activist dialogues through cultural reclamation, the explicit acts of creating consciousness with their audience also marked a change in the ways that the band was written about. The media representations of the band had been done in mystical and supernatural ways. Along with these narratives that placed the band members in an almost divine manner, was a new sense of empowerment and agency that was not seen before. In the San Francisco based newspaper *El Mensajero* (The Messenger), writer Ricardo Ibarra describes the 2011 concert:

El lugar fue un verdadero campo de batalla, donde como dijo Saúl, la vida es para luchar, o algo así, y la pelea se dio todo el concierto con el rito del slam golpeando la vida de un lado a otro frente al escenario y con los cantos agudos que por más de una hora llenaron el auditorio de una

vibración excepcional, como si el pasado se volviera presente, y futuro. (The place was a true battle field, like Saúl said, life is to fight for, or something like that, and the fight was given at the concert with the ritual of the slam, beating life from one side to the other, in front of the venue and with drowned out songs for more than one hour they filled the auditorium with an exceptional vibration, like the past became the present and future.

The description, "...el pasado se volviera presente, y futuro" (the past became the present and future), speaks to the complication of time, as past and present are not separated; as discussed in the introduction. So too are Chicanas/os challenging conventional notions of time, culture, nationalism, and activism as they create third space identities. These complications become clear as Chicanas/os engage with the past, present, and future in their own ways.

This article begins to show how the media representation of the group transformed from mystical to political. Describing the scene as a "campo de batalla" (battlefield) and "rito" (ritual), Hernandez became both a spiritual and human rights leader. *Caifanes* and *Jaguares* are fusing their narratives to reclaim cultural and spiritual identity with quotidian struggles for human rights. In this way, *El Mensajero* Newspaper is speaking directly to a Chicana/o intersectional cultural, political, and spiritual sensibility.

The *Jaguares* music video "Arriesgate" (Take a risk) shows images of the band members along side moments of social activism. These images show the band's spiritual and emotional side as they

contemplate the message of the song (see Fig. 5). The image below shows band member *El Vampiro* (The Vampire) in deep thought alongside a Zapatista that has a sign that reads "Por Que" (Why). A connection to the Zapatista movement that started in 1994 and demanded indigenous rights from the Mexican government marks an investment that separates the band from official nationalist discourses. Here Jaguares are calling on their fan base to be a part of their activism.

Creating dialogues of revolution and spirituality the group is demonstrating an activist identity that reflects Mexicans and Chicanas/os daily life. Not having to make distinctions between cultural, political, and spiritual makers allows Chicanas/os to understand and practice a third space identity that encompasses the lived realities of being "Ni de aqui, Ni de alla." As the group has made a clear agenda to separate Mexican identity from a specific government entity, so too can Chicanas/os create their own definitions of identity separate from mainstream nationalist propaganda and instead around local and international social justice activisms.



Fig.6. Jaguares, "Arriesgate," Official Video, 2002.

In an article for *La Opinión*, Lucero Amador-Miranda describes Hernández's dedication to social activism. She states, "*Saúl Hernández ha destacado en los últimos años por ser un ferviente defensor de los derechos humanos. Así, se ha unido a campañas que repudian los asesinatos de mujeres en la ciudad fronteriza de Juárez, a la causa de los inmigrantes y en contra de la violencia que vive actualmente México.*"⁷² (In recent years, Saúl Hernández has launched himself as a fervent defender of human rights. Uniting with campaigns that reject the murders of the women in the border town city of Juárez, to the cause of immigrants, and the violence that now lives in Mexico.) Jaguares involvement in raising awareness of the femicide in the

⁷² Lucero Amador-Miranda, "Festejo musical," (*La Opinión*, Los Angeles, Sep. 16, 2010, 2011), accessed Apr. 8, 2012, Ethnic News watch. Translation by author.

U.S./Mexico border marked a point of change in lyrics and concert dialogue with the audience. While the ceremonial aspect of the show continued, a rise in consciousness of atrocities like the murders of the women in Juarez became a staple at every show. The group was not shy about placing much of the blame on the Mexican government for not doing enough to find those responsible for the killings, and urged U.S. audiences to become involved in putting pressure on authorities on both sides of the border to get involved. Through these benefit concerts the group was able to continue evolving their concerts from simple entertainment to ceremony and site for resistance.

Writer for the Mexican based newspaper *Palabra*, Mayra Bosada describes an intimate concert in Barcelona where Hernández took the time to speak against the killing of women in Juarez. She describes,

"Hernandez, vestido con un camiseta negra con la leyenda," "No Violence Against Women. Justice in Juarez" y una chaqueta estilo mariachi, arranco la tocada a las 21:40 horas al interpretar "Bruja Canibal" y "Matenme porque me Muero", temas que fueron recibidos con gritos, brincos y bailes... Tras interpretar esta cancion, Hernandez se dio tiempo para hablar a la gente sobre los asesinatos de mujeres en Ciudad Juarez: 'Les pedimos apoyo para esta lucha, que se enteren de lo que sucede y reflexionen. Nosotros luchamos porque se haga justicia y se capture a los verdaderos asesino.'" ⁷³(Hernandez dressed in a black t-shirt with an image reading "No Violence Against Women. Justice in Juarez" and a mariachi jacket, he started the show at 21:40 hours interpreted songs "Bruja Canibal" y "Matanme porque me Muero", themes that were received with screams and dance... In interpreting the song, Hernandez took time to speak to the people about the murders of women in

⁷³ Mayra Bosada, "Ofrecen intimo concierto," (*Palabra*, Saltillo, MX., Nov. 11, 2005), accessed Apr. 8, 2012, Ethnic News Watch.

the city of Juarez: 'We ask for your support in this struggle, that you become aware of what is happening and you reflect on it. We struggle so there can be justice and that they capture the real murderers.)

This call for action became a staple piece of their shows and interviews. For many Chicanas/os it allowed a connection to a transnational struggle. Through benefit shows, letter writing to both U.S. and Mexican governments, and grass roots organizing some of my interviewees that volunteered at these events described how they were able to understand their transnational identity in autonomous ways, free from nationalistic representations.

Gonzalo Aburto, writer for the New York based newspaper *El Diario La Prensa* describes a benefit concert where various *rock en español* artists came together to support the Women of Juarez movement. He states,

*Después de 12 años volvieron a reunirse dos símbolos del rock latinoamericano: Saúl Hernández, líder de Jaguares y antes de Caifanes, y Cerati, fundador de la leyenda que fue Soda Stereo. Además los artistas se manifestaron sobre lo que se conoce a nivel internacional como las "muertas de Juárez", una terrible ola de asesinatos y la violencia en contra de las mujeres de Juárez, muchas de las canciones fueron interpretadas en honor a las víctimas, y para exigirle al gobierno mexicano que solucione el problema."*⁷⁴
(After 12 years two symbols of Latin American Rock reunited: Saul Hernandez leader of Jaguares and before Caifanes, and Cerati, founder of the legend that was Soda Stereo. These artist came together in what is internationally known as "femicide in Juarez", a terrible wave of murders and violence toward the women of Juarez, many of the songs were interpreted in honor of the victims,

⁷⁴ Gonzalo Aburto, "Alterlatino; Jaguares y Cerati se unen por las muertas de Juarez," (*El Diario La Prensa*, New York, Apr. 4, 2004), accessed Apr. 8, 2012, Ethnic News Watch.

and to urge the Mexican government to find a solution to the problem.)

With many of the benefit concert dates located in U.S. cities it became clear that the organizers and bands wanted voices from this side of the border. As Aburto states that "many of the songs were interpreted in honor of the victims," so too did many of the groups involved begin to dedicate their music videos to raising awareness and consciousness. In the music video to "Arriesgate," Jaguares display images of rallies and protests to the murders of women in Juarez (See Fig.6.) Since then, the Caifanes, Jaguares, and Saúl Hernández's solo work has been dedicated to fighting for human rights.



Fig.7. Jaguares, "Arriesgate," Official Video, 2002.

In an article for *El Norte*, Manuel Tejada describes a *Caifanes* concert in Mexico City where Hernández describes the distrust in government by the people. He quotes Hernández,

Es importante hilar una serie de eventos porque el Gobierno tiene que entender que para gobernar no se necesitan votos, sino credibilidad, y tenemos que recuperarla en nuestros gobernantes.⁷⁵ (It is important to string together a series of events because the government needs to understand that to govern you do not need votes, you need credibility, and we need to recuperate it for our governors.)

As these atrocities continue to occur at the hands of the Mexican government, the movement to create a Mexican identity free of national representation grows. In the same fashion as U.S. politicians call upon Chicanas/os during elections, who are then left to fend for themselves as soon as the campaign ends, so too are Mexican citizens discarded by those who are supposed to represent them.

In an interview with Nora Estrada of *El Norte*, Saúl Hernández speaks to the need for grassroots movements for change. He states,

El gobierno no esta haciendo lo suficiente para resolver este problema. Nosotros tenemos que ser los que generemos el cambio. Es importante que la gente conozca sus derechos y use su derecho para denunciar hechos negativos. Esto pareceria ser muy idealista, pero yo creo en un mundo justo. Gritare sobre estos hechos hasta el dia que muera.⁷⁶ (The government is not doing enough to solve the problem. We are the ones that need to enact change. It is important that people understand their rights, and use their rights to denounce negative acts. This can sound idealist, but I believe in a just world. I will yell for this change until the day I die.)

⁷⁵ Manuel Tejeda, "Apoyan derechos humanos," (*El Norte*, Monterrey, MX. Jul. 7, 2011), accessed Apr. 8, 2012, Ethnic News Watch.

⁷⁶ Nora Alicia Estrada, "Cantara Jaguares por Mujeres de Juarez," (*El Norte*, Monterrey, MX., Oct. 31, 2004), accessed Apr. 8, 2012, Ethnic News Watch.

This call for change in many ways embodies the resilience in the face of oppressive power structures for Chicanas/os. To hear a person like Saúl Hernández speak of this quotidian struggle inspires his fans to continue their own forms of resistance whether or not they are in line with his own beliefs. While Hernández says "Esto parecería ser muy idealista, pero yo creo en un mundo justo," for many living under oppressive governmental rule, sometimes all we can rely on is ideals. As times get difficult, bodies and minds get burned out, the strength we get from our ideals can be enough to say, "Gritare sobre estos hechos hasta el día que muera."

Conclusion

The space around *rock en Español* in the U.S. allows Chicanas/os to challenge hegemonic understandings of who they are supposed to be and what their role is within the mainstream American society and culture. By highlighting the inequalities within these spaces, I have attempted to document the struggles, past and present, which inform much of the identity politics in Chicana/o communities through *rock en Español*. Through an analysis of various newspapers in the U.S. and Mexico, I highlighted the ways in which the *rock en Español* group *Caifanes*, *Jaguares*, and lead singer of both groups Saúl Hernández, are represented on both sides of the border. This chapter focused on the ways newspapers and the media represent the group's investment in Mexican nationalism and the different ways they are

presented in Mexico and the U.S. Through the three themes of activism, spirituality and nationalism, I analyzed the role of the group for Chicanas/os in the U.S. These themes assisted in guiding a discussion on the significance that *Caifanes* and *Jaguares* have in informing and complicating Mexican nationalism for Chicanas/os in the U.S.

"Mira como sangro. Que no sientes como tiemblo? No te importa verme sufrir?... Soy un mundo, no me destruyas, que quiero conocer la paz interior."⁷⁷ Caifanes

"Hace mucho tiempo que no pasa nada. Nadie se preocupa de que el sol un día muera. Hay una actitud de calma mientras mi cuerpo arde. La indiferencia puede costarte la vida... Ahora es tu tiempo y no es momento de calma. Enfrenta la injusticia, la mentira, el asesino. Eres esa persona en la que yo, yo si creo. Que va a cambiar la ruta de los huracanes."⁷⁸

Chapter 4

"Me Estoy Quedando sin Sangre:" The Nation, The New Frontier, and Chicana/o identity reclamation

I still remember the day when my kindergarten teacher "recommended" to my mom that I repeat the grade. I emphasize recommend because in first generation migrant households, the role of a teacher has high prestige, so it was more of a "your son flunked kindergarten!" Like many second generation Chicanas/os, Spanish was my first language, and while I grew up watching Saturday morning cartoons like many American kids, I did not learn to speak English until my first few years in school. Since my first kindergarten teacher felt that my English skills did not meet the requirements of the 1st grade, I was forced to

⁷⁷ Caifanes, "Piedra" in *El Silencio*, (Sony U.S. Latin, 1992). "Look how I bleed. Can't you feel how I shake? Does it not bother you to see me suffer?... I am a world, do not destroy me because I want to find internal peace." Translated by author.

⁷⁸ Jaguares, "Arriesgate," *El Primer Instinto* (RCA record label, 2002). "It has been a long time since nothing happens. No one worries that the sun will one day die. There is an attitude of calm while my body burns. Indifference can cost your life. Now is your time and it is not a moment for calm. Face the injustice, the lies, the murder. You are that person that I, I do believe in. That will change the route of hurricanes." Translated by author.

repeat. It is obvious that repeating kindergarten was not about my failure to grasp the concepts that were presented to me in the classroom, but about a delegitimization of my academic contributions because of my language. Since then English has become my primary language, and now I struggle to articulate myself with fluent Spanish speakers. As a second generation Mexican migrant to the U.S., the loss of my native language and culture has given me opportunities that many like my parents did not have available, so much so that I am the first member in my extended family to attend graduate school.

This is a typical narrative in Chicana/o communities and it speaks to the legitimacy conferred to English and the ostracizing of those that do not or cannot comply with U.S. linguistic standards. For people of color language too becomes racialized, as fluency in Spanish becomes a deficiency, while it is seen as a positive for white bodies. In the same manner, white bodies that are deficient in English skills have the privilege to not be ostracized in the same manner as people of color. In conversation with canonical American Studies works that describe the formation of this nation, this chapter will focus on how Chicana/o identity is affected by loss of language and forced assimilation. In a society where English speakers are dominant, I am first reviewing literature that reflects the daily struggles of those who do not fit the hegemonic standards of the U.S., and their strategies to take back the language; particularly through the use of *rock en Español*. I also introduce the concept I am calling *Musica*

*Conciente*⁷⁹ to shed light on spaces that allow for the expression of a collective and resistant Chicana/o identity without fear of scrutiny or language policing. *Musica conciente* will be used in a larger context to understand the ways that Chicanas/os create spaces of resistance, activism, and belonging through music that speaks to their lived experience as people of color and a transnational identity within the U.S. While this research is grounded in the late 20th century and the early 21st Century, it has implications across generations of resistance to U.S. hegemony and exceptionalism based on race, language, and culture.

Language: An American Frontier

As the Latina/o communities continue to grow, U.S. notions of *reconquista*, the thought that Mexicans are attempting to take back U.S. lands that once belonged to the Mexican state, arise especially with the presence of new immigrants that presumably do not meet the hegemonic standards of American culture. This "failure" to assimilate creates a new frontier as Latina/o communities continue to practice cultural difference and a language that is deemed inferior in America. The frontier is a site where the struggle to continue American domination over a population that should have been complacent from prior expansionist expeditions. With Latinos/as challenging the notion of American supremacy by not submitting to it in the U.S.

⁷⁹ This term translates to conscious music. Translated by author.

territories, the new challenge is to implement notions of manifest destiny that have worked well in the past.

In, *The Frontier in American History*, Frederick Jackson Turner speaks to the expansion of the American frontier and the notions of manifest destiny that justified their expansion.

The fact is, that here is a new product that is American. At first, the frontier was the Atlantic coast. It was the frontier of Europe in a very real sense. Moving westward, the frontier became more and more American. As successive terminal moraines result from successive glaciations, so each frontier leaves its traces behind it, and when it becomes a settled area the region still partakes of the frontier characteristics.⁸⁰

As migrants continue to practice cultural difference the notion of a frontier will continue. Migrants and their children become unruly inhabitants of conquered lands that need to be "civilized" and "saved." Narratives of American supremacy continue a long legacy of violence, both physical and psychological, toward people of color as they are forced to assimilate to U.S. white mainstream culture.

People of color are led to believe concepts like the melting pot, equality, and anti-racism means that they do not have to hold onto any remnant of their cultural identity. In my conversation with Rita she discussed how there was very little attention paid to her cultural identity, even though she attended schools with predominately Latinas/os.

⁸⁰ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt, 1921).

For the most part I didn't really speak Spanish, like the only teacher that I had that spoke Spanish was my kindergarten teacher, the rest of my teachers were not bilingual... so I don't really think that I was really encouraged to speak Spanish or celebrate or anything like that, it wasn't something that we did in class. All of my elementary school teachers were white.⁸¹

The investment by school systems to have predominately white teachers in people of color communities speaks to both value placed on white knowledge producers and the way people of color have been systematically excluded from higher education and thus, the profession. It also indicates the way in which non-white and/or non-Euro Americans have to linguistically meet white teachers at their comfort zone. White privilege here means not having to acknowledge student's diverse cultures, languages, and knowledges, even in schools that are predominately Latina/o. "At the national level, students of color make up more than 40 percent of the public school population. In contrast, teachers of color—teachers who are not non-Hispanic white—are only 17 percent of the teaching force."⁸² Narratives of diversity here are only relevant if communities of color assimilate and accept white values, knowledge, and systems. The U.S. values diversity as long as it does not seriously challenge whiteness or white dominance and as long as they do not have to go out of their way to learn about other cultures. Co-opting cultural cuisine and days of remembrance they can transform into drinking holidays, or

⁸¹ Rita, interview with Daniel Topete, November 28, 2014.

⁸² Ulrich Boser, "Teacher Diversity Matters: A State-by-State Analysis of Teachers of Color" (Center for American Progress; www.americanprogress.org, November, 2011).

clothing that becomes trendy is generally the limit to which diversity can be comfortably accepted. None of which challenges white supremacy or existing structures of inequality.

As the mythology of equality and diversity continue to propose that discrimination does not exist in American society, the steady influence of colonialism shapes the hierarchical positioning of cultures in the U.S. In her article "'Left Alone With America': The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture," Amy Kaplan speaks to the constant colonial influence that was founded in the expansion of U.S. territories. "*Cultures of United States Imperialism* takes for its subject what Miller relegated to the unnarrated background of Africa: the multiple histories of continental and overseas expansion, conquest, conflict, and resistance which have shaped the cultures of the United States and the cultures of those it has and beyond its geopolitical boundaries."⁸³ As American exceptionalism continues to be the highest level of "civility," anything that strays from that norm will continue to be ostracized from mainstream society.

Many Chicanas/os are shamed into believing that their language and culture are "backward" and "uncivilized." In their book, *Racial formation in the United States: from the 1960s to the 1980s*, Micheal Omi and Howard Winant discuss how the U.S.

⁸³ Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, *Cultures of United States imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

continues with narratives of exceptionalism that places many people on the "outside."

In many ways Obama is reiterating the center-left neoliberalism first developed by Bill Clinton. David Theo Goldberg (2008, 42-44) has written of a "racial neoliberalism" that is linked to theories of absolutism, state sovereignty, and "exceptional" states (drawing on classical courses and once again echoing Schmitt). This modern state governs a *civil* society. It has an *outside* that is not civil. Its outside consists of slums, occupied territories, prison, and the underground underworlds where fugitives, undocumented, poor, and homeless people live (Mbembe 2001; Davis 2006; Goffman 2009; Park 2013).⁸⁴

These narratives continue a long history of criminalizing people of color, and justifying the violence inflicted on them in the name of progress and civility. In his 2014 Statement of Executive order speech, President Barack Obama spoke about a broken immigration system that places millions of undocumented people in the shadows. In doing so, he continued with narratives that create xenophobia and overall fear of brown bodies.

I want to say more about this third issue, because it generates the most passion and controversy. Even as we are a nation of immigrants, we're also a nation of laws. Undocumented workers broke our immigration laws, and I believe that they must be held accountable -- especially those who may be dangerous. That's why, over the past six years, deportations of criminals are up 80 percent. And that's why we're going to keep focusing enforcement resources on actual threats to our security. Felons, not families. Criminals, not children. Gang members, not a mom who's working hard to provide for her kids. We'll prioritize, just like law enforcement does every day. But

⁸⁴ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial formation in the United States: from the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).

even as we focus on deporting criminals, the fact is, millions of immigrants in every state, of every race and nationality still live here illegally. And let's be honest -- tracking down, rounding up, and deporting millions of people isn't realistic.⁸⁵

While he tries to separate the "criminals" and "families," U.S. history has shown that white America cannot make that distinction. As the numbers of deaths of people of color continue to rise on the border and in U.S. cities by agents of the state (police and border patrol) without any ramifications, it becomes clear non-whites are seen as a threat to the nation. Omi and Winant continue:

"Those people" are dangerous, criminal, less "civilized," less deserving. Goldberg's "threat of race" centers on this frontier between these two social spaces let us call them. They can neither be entirely joined nor separated. The border between them must be strenuously policed, an effort that requires electrified fences, Hellfire missiles, and extraordinary renditions. As Goldberg suggests, this is the form racism takes today: supervision and control of the racial "threat" in defense of an ever-more confined and restricted zone of prosperity: the ostensibly "civil" society of neoliberalism.⁸⁶

Among the most common institutions of "supervision and control" are public schools. They are the first state run location where we are inculcated with notions of civility. Narratives of civility and progress have created the illusion of equality for people of color if they let go of their language,

⁸⁵ Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Immigration" November 20, 2014, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/20/remarks-president-address-nation-immigration>

⁸⁶ Michael Omi and Howard Winant.

culture, and identity. Many migrants are willing to risk the loss of their cultural heritage for the possibilities of having children that are successful in a U.S. context; especially because they believe that teachers and administrators have their best interests in mind. Mexican parents often come to this country with much more respect for teachers and school administrators than is found in mainstream U.S. culture.

For first generation migrants who want the best life possible for themselves and their children, they rarely get in the way of the assimilation process; in fact they often welcome it. In my interview with Sal, a second-generation Mexican migrant, he spoke of his parent's experience influencing the way he was raised in the U.S. "I think in the beginning, for the most part education was our only way out, you know what I mean? Coming from a family of immigrants, when they came they didn't know the language at all, so they stressed it, especially my parents, like my mom supported it and my dad too cuz he worked construction."⁸⁷ For Sal's parents having their children lose their native language for a foreign one must have been difficult, but U.S. narratives of modernity and civility leads many first generation migrants to believe that their children will not go through the same violence that they experienced. Concepts of modernity continue to justify discrimination, segregation, and elimination of all that is labeled inferior. The hierarchical structure of modernity thus forces people of color at the bottom to strive not

⁸⁷ Sal, interview with Daniel Topete, March 25, 2014.

only for the material benefits of the top, but to be accepted into the structures of whiteness where they would no longer be inferior.

In his book *American Studies in a Moment of Danger*, George Lipsitz speaks to the possibilities of "dislodging" whiteness from global systems:

The shake-up in spatial and social relations in our time does nothing to dislodge long-standing forms of white supremacy. Instead, structural-adjustment policies, mass migration, and attacks on the social institutions traditionally responsible for creating greater equality all function together in our time to make "whiteness" a global as well as a national project, to insure the permanent supremacy of the largely "white" global north over the largely "non-white" global south, and even to restore power in the global south to the light-skinned elites who in the era of decolonization found themselves forced to make concessions to the dark-skinned masses of their own countries.⁸⁸

For many second-generation migrants in the U.S., narratives of white supremacy often force them to reject their culture, traditions, and language. These narratives of modernity and advancement lead many people of color to believe they have no future if they do not assimilate to whiteness. These narratives are also seductive. As such they create the desire for the power and privilege they encompass. While I understand that first and second-generation migrant's experiences are not the same, I argue that the levels of violence and coercion they experience, while different are comparable. Concepts of modernity continue to

⁸⁸ George Lipsitz, *American Studies in a Moment of Danger* (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 9.

justify the discrimination, segregation, and elimination of all that is labeled inferior.

Modernity in turn creates the guidelines for rationality and the burden of "liberating" irrational actors from their own demise. In his chapter "The Birth and Death of American History," David Noble writes,

"I am arguing, then, that in the bourgeois synthesis of the Enlightenment and romanticism, of nature and nation, of rationality and a national people, a generation of Anglo-Protestant men born about 1800 in the United States shared the vision of the Prussian G.W.F. Hegel that only a particular nation could lead the exodus from a lower to a higher civilization."⁸⁹

The exclusivity of American rationality leads the chosen to create violent laws and regulations to control the irrational people. This oppressive environment forces many to create spaces of resistance that allow for daily survival. While these spaces of resistance manifest in a variety of ways, this work focuses on *rock en Español* as a form of *Musica Conciente*, and explicates the influence it has on Chicana/o identity in oppressive sites.

Forms of Resistance:

Musica Conciente is a term that refers to the way in which music creates counter narratives to mainstream misinterpretations of communities of color, and how it can be used to express social, political, cultural, and revolutionary ideals. The term "Conciente" or conscious is taken from Paulo Freire's term

⁸⁹ David Noble, *Death of a Nation: American Culture and the end of Exceptionalism* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

conscientização or consciousness in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. "The term *conscientização* refers to the process of learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality."⁹⁰ Thus, *Musica Conciente* is my label for musical performance that creates *conscientização* for communities of color, and that can become a vehicle for facilitating spaces of resistance and belonging.

Musica Conciente rejects the information given by mainstream society and retells it in a manner that is much more relevant to Chicanas/os. In his book *Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos among Mexican Americans*, Ignacio Garcia describes the identities of the early Chicano Movement, which precedes *rock en Español* by several decades.

Chicano historians discovered old heroes and reinterpreted old events through a new nationalist framework that made Mexican Americans active participants in history. This reinterpretation led Mexican Americans to discard the stereotypes of the lazy, passive, mañana-oriented Mexicano and replaced it with the proud, historically rich Chicano or Chicana, who was ready to fight for his or her community.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 1970 ed.), 35.

⁹¹ Ignacio M. Garcia, *Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos among Mexican Americans* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 11.

Musica Conciente similarly rejects stereotypes and labels held or created by U.S. society. In creating music that rejects stereotypical labels these artists are in turn constructing their own understanding of Chicana/o identity for new generations of Mexicans, Mexican immigrants and Chicanas/os.

Chicanismo, as defined in the introduction, has always been a counter space that incorporates aspects of identity that are often not representative of either U.S. or Mexican cultural standards. Artists identifying as Chicanas/os do so knowing the political and cultural implications that are linked to the term. Historically Chicana/o was used as a derogatory term that was embraced by youth growing up in the United States in the 1960's. This embrace created a counter culture that highlighted the struggles many Chicanas/os had in the inner city. In the 1960's and 1970's, the term Chicana/o described a politically conscious Mexican American that denounced many of labels placed by U.S. mainstream society. This counter space gives artists the freedom to address cultural and political ideals that are often not expressed within mainstream society's ideologies of belonging.

By using cultural images such as Mesoamerican glyphs, pictures of Zapatistas from the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), and other images that create a cultural nostalgia within many Chicanas/os in the barrios, these groups are reaching out to a specific audience. With the success of cultural shops and Chicana/o ethnic pride t-shirts the impact

that visual representations have on people is evident. By using culturally significant images within their promotion, artists are also reaching out to specific oppositional ideologies. These specific images allow their audience a glimpse into their music before even hearing it. If these images create any positive sentiments, then it is likely that they will buy their albums and/or attend their shows. Thus there is both commercial and social value to these resistant images.

For many Chicanas/os trying to find an identity that speaks to a lived experience in the U.S., connecting to *Musica Conciente* can solidify a strong sense of cultural awareness and give a sense of belonging. Rita discusses how she was able to find validation for her developing voice and identity in *rock en Español*.

I feel like as a teenager this kind of *rebeldia* that was spoken about in *rock en Español*, or even trying to figure out my identity as a Chicana and trying to identify with like a movement for liberation once I found out what the Chicano movement was, I felt like *rock en Español* and also I listened to some punk rock in English, spoke to that experience. Before I got involved in activism, I was a little aspiring activist and I really wanted to connect with people who were doing activist work because that's what I wanted to do.⁹²

This awareness and connection can begin the healing process for many Chicanas/os who have been wounded and scared by years of cultural shaming. Having a space that validates the cultural memory and pride that is negated for communities of color, can

⁹² Rita, interview with Daniel Topete, November 28, 2014.

begin the process of Chicana/o identity formation within a U.S. context.

A connection to spaces around *rock en Español* allows for many Chicanas/os to create counter hegemonic narratives of their community that influences identity formation. This music speaks to the struggles and experiences of the barrio, which validate and acknowledge the material, social, and political realities of Chicanas/os living in the U.S. The experience of living in the barrio, despite migratory status, directly influenced the way Chicanas/os express their politics on citizenship, belonging and identity. In her chapter "Redefining Citizenship as a Lived Experience" Suzanne Oboler states,

The focus here, then, is on citizenship as constitutive of the self-understanding of a community—a process that is inclusive and on going and one that is neither imposed nor dictated by the state alone. Rather, it is a lived experience grounded in the negotiated participation of all groups, of all sectors and individuals within the community.⁹³

In this case, there is a fine line between the lived experience of documented and undocumented people living in the barrio. It becomes clear that the racism and discrimination that occurs in these communities is less about citizenship, and is related to the narratives of Latino people as a whole. These narratives inform the practices and beliefs that mainstream

⁹³ Suzanne Oboler, "Redefining Citizenship as a Lived Experience" in *Latinos and Citizenship: The Dilemma of Belonging* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 5.

American society has about this community in a variety of ways: through music, television, print, etc. For this reason, spaces created around *rock en Español* have the ability to reject stereotypes and create new narratives that speak directly to Chicana/o communities. Chantico describes how a *rock en Español* group Caifanes, was able to speak to her on a variety of levels that mainstream pop music simply could not do.

There was a period of time that I was deprived from that and it was like, it was a very obscure period of time, it was a strange period of time, but when I was able to regain access to music that I chose, it was that... that was the music that I went to cuz that's where I left off, you know... and I remember feeling okay again, like I don't know... *aveces me cansan tambien*⁹⁴, but feeling like "AAAAHHH! This is what I needed to hear." I remember the first song that I was like "AAAAHHH!!!" that I learned by heart "*Afuera. Horita que me estabas preguntando*"⁹⁵ about the lyrics, it was about that... its about living in the margins, right? I think it is just being able to sing at the top of my lungs is very liberating and I wouldn't get that from other genres... I wouldn't get that from Talia, I wouldn't get that satisfaction of having a relief, an emotional relief in that I think a lot of times we don't give music enough credit for moving us spiritually, really... and that space exists too.⁹⁶

Once a connection to *musica conciente* is made just to "sing at the top of my lungs" in Spanish is not enough, the music has to speak to a deeper sentiment or experience. While pop music, like Talia can be fun, Chantico discusses how the subject matter in that music is lacking in the kind of depth that makes long

⁹⁴ "There are times that get tired of them too." Translated by author.

⁹⁵ "Right now that you were asking me." Translated by author.

⁹⁶ Chantico, interview with Daniel Topete, August 7, 2014.

lasting connections to their audience. Having a deep connection to *musica conciente* can begin to alleviate some of the violence experienced by people of color in the U.S. Chantico continues:

I think, being able to look at it with the consciousness that I have now, it makes sense that whatever frustrations, whatever alienation, whatever absence of someone or something to identify with was happening was calmed down by music that I appreciated as a teenager that I was able to go back to, that I am able to go back to at different times in life and it still feels right... it creates that space and it is something that you can share with someone or it can also be very private.⁹⁷

A sense of calm and safety can be huge, especially when you live in a space that is constantly criminalizing brown bodies. Making a personal and private connection to a group or artist can represent a voice that understands the quotidian struggles of life in the U.S. *Rock en Español* has become a voice that can articulate a push back to the anti-immigrant narratives that Chicanas/os hear on a daily basis, and at the same time begin to reclaim a sense of pride of one's culture and ancestry. One of the common elements of oppression is isolation. People begin to develop a sense that they are alone in being devalued, criminalized, rejected, shamed, and excluded from the privileges of white middle classes. Hearing someone sing about your "personal" pain as something shared by others is empowering as it helps you realize you are neither alone nor crazy for experiencing life in this way.

⁹⁷ Chantico, interview with Daniel Topete, August 7, 2014.

Music has always been a way for cultures to express their ideals, experiences, and views of the world. Music provides its listeners a sense of their identity and roles in their society. In her book *Corridos in Migrant Memory*, Martha I. Chew Sanchez explores the relationship between music and identity:

The relationship between music and identity has been conceptualized as mobile and constantly emerging-as a process rather than an object. Music shapes our identity because it fuses mental fantasy and body engagement through the integration of shared aesthetic, ethics, social roles, relationships with nature, and relationships with others. It provides the means by which ethnic, gender, and class identities are constructed, negotiated, and transformed.⁹⁸

In a society that has strict definitions of what is authentically national, spaces created around music can allow for a sense of belonging in places that reject them. Participation in these spaces allow for its members to create an identity that is in opposition to U.S. power structures. Their treatment as second-class citizens, regardless of status, creates a working class ethos that is shared in communities of color. In her article, "Roads to Citizenship: Mexican Migrants in the United States" Alejandra Castañeda explores the intersections between mixed status migrants in the U.S.

Because migrants-different but equal-are political actors, regardless of the possession or nonpossession of papers that establish legal residency, citizenship, or nationality, their citizenship can be viewed as a political

⁹⁸ Martha I. Chew Sanchez, *Corridos in Migrant Memory* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 8.

strategy, a perspective that emphasizes its character as a historical construct rather than a universal essence.⁹⁹

Here Castañeda examines notions of a community and belonging that is not based on immigrant status, but on lived experience. This sense of belonging under a U.S. context creates a transnational identity for Chicanas/os that also speaks to a pan-Latina/o sensibility.

Chicanas/os understanding their identity through a transnational lens opens the possibility to connect with world-wide struggles that complicate simplistic and often racist understandings of Latina/o communities in the U.S. Alicia Schmidt Camacho describes in her book, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.- Mexico Borderlands*, how conventional understandings of transnational identities can be blurred.

The migrant in this study not only connotes one who moves within and across national boundaries; it also references a subordinate position with respect to that of the citizen. The transnational refers to the space in which distinct national localities are linked together by migratory flows, and the diasporas formed by this migration. The transnational may also stand in opposition to the bounded community of the nation-state.¹⁰⁰

Rock en Español brings this transnational identity that incorporates various identities and cultures into one

⁹⁹ Alejandra Castañeda, "Roads to Citizenship: Mexican Migrants in the United States" in *Latinos and Citizenship: The Dilemma of Belonging* ed. Suzanne Oboler (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 146.

¹⁰⁰ Alicia Schmidt-Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.- Mexico Borderlands* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 5.

experiential oriented space. Musical genres ranging from hip-hop to reggae in *rock en Español*, highlights a transnational identity that goes beyond Latino countries, but can also describe internal migration patterns.

These transnational identities can lead Chicanas/os to create their own spaces within oppressive environments that can feel like autonomous pockets of resistance to mainstream America. In these pockets of resistance Chicanas/os can "rethink" their role in American society according to past and present social movements and histories that have been negated to them. In his article titled "The X in Race and Gender: Rethinking Chicano/a cultural production through the paradigms of Xicanisma and Me(x)icannes," Juan Velasco describes the reconstruction of the term Chicana/o to Xicana/o.

The "X" as signifier allows a new reconfiguration of identity, as it is articulated in the discourse of gender and racial difference. Within a broader American and Latin American context, the analysis of race questions traditional and monolithic notions of *mestizo* and multiracial identity. Furthermore, the concept of race within a multiracial-*mestizo* category, which was an essential mark for Chicano identity during the 1970s, is being politically challenged during the 1990s through Xicanisma.¹⁰¹

This reconfiguration highlights the evolution of the term Chicana/o. The incorporation of the "X" allows for the exploration of struggles and narratives that were left out by the

¹⁰¹ Juan Velasco, "The X in Race and Gender: Rethinking Chicano/a cultural production through the paradigms of Xicanisma and Me(x)icannes" in *The Chicana/o Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Angie Chabram-Dernersesian (New York: Routledge, 2006), 209.

Chicano movement and broadens a movement of resistance. While the struggles of Chicanas/os in the past facilitated many opportunities for future generations, there continues a fight to retain and reclaim connections to cultural identity in the U.S. as new forms of old oppressions are (re)invented.

Although the violence experienced by Chicanas/os today is not as overtly unapologetic as in the past, a narrative of anti-racist, post-race, and diversity has clouded discussions of violent discrimination that continues. Understanding a Chicana/o identity with an "X" makes clear an investment in indigenous ways of knowing within a Chicana/o sensibility and allows for a connection to indigenous communities and their struggles for survival. An indigenous identity not only ties Chicanas/os to their cultural roots, but also grounds them in these continental spaces, giving them a sense of agency and determination to face the constant racist and discriminatory actions by U.S. institutions.

Korina describes the excitement and pride she felt when she saw an indigenous person on an album cover and what it meant for her.

When I first saw the cover to the Jaguares, I don't know what the name of it is, but there's a guy wearing a copili, that's probably one of the first times that I saw something like that in music. I knew about Aztec dancing, and I knew about Danzantes, but to see a Danzante on a cover of an album was like huge. I think I was just like 'oh my god! What does this mean!' I think it's the same thing that happened when I took Chicano Studies, its like these two

worlds are colliding and like Tigres were different, they were my first introduction to Spanish music and I think it's a different kind of look or a different kind of presentation and like for Jaguares specifically, they have a lot of images that are pre-colonial and for me I identified that as identity building.. and then the shows, the fans were always bringing flags, Mexican flags and stuff like that.¹⁰²

Having this indigenous connection allows for a spiritual and cultural understanding of Chicana/o identity beyond a U.S. and Mexican context. Being able to reclaim your culture, language, and ancestral past through music and art allows Chicanas/os to make those connections on their own terms. Here they are no longer "illegal aliens" but rather the historical, indigenous inhabitants of this land space.

In her article, "Hybridity and Authenticity in US Day of the Dead Celebrations," Regina Marchi discusses how celebrations with indigenous roots created spaces for Chicanas/os to begin to question and challenge their European ancestry. "Deeply moved by the aesthetics and metaphysics of Dia de los Muertos rituals among Indigenous communities in Mexico, Chicano artists adopted this celebration as a symbol of Chicano identity that privileged Mexico's Indigenous ancestry over its European."¹⁰³ Here Marchi speaks to how this indigenous connection even begins to challenge Mexican narratives of indigenous people and culture, and create a hybrid Chicana/o identity. She states:

¹⁰² Korina, interview with Daniel Topete, November 11, 2014.

¹⁰³ Regina Marchi, "Hybridity and Authenticity in U.S. Day of the Dead Celebrations," *Journal of American Folklore* 126 (501):272-301, (2013): 279.

Most of the young Chicanos who initiated U.S. Day of the Dead exhibits in the 1970s were no longer practicing Catholics and many felt resentment toward the Catholic Church for its historical connections with colonialism, imperialism and sexism. Yet, while Chicano observances were not religious, they reflected hybrid aspects of what Tere Romos calls, "Chicano spirituality", incorporating both Catholic and Indigenous symbols. Iconography such as crucifixes, Bibles, rosary beads, and pictures of the saints, Jesus, or the Virgin Mary were often arranged on altars in self-reflexive ways, together with Aztec calendars, clay figures of Aztec or Mayan deities, or other Indigenous symbols."¹⁰⁴

Chicano spirituality becomes a way to find pride in Mexican Catholic iconography without ties to the religion. This understanding allows many Chicanas/os to connect to traditional cultural practices but leaving room to negotiate U.S. lived experiences.

Life in the margins of mainstream society creates alternatives forms of understanding life in the U.S. By creating new understandings of Chicanas/os *rock en Español* complicates what defines Chicana/o. Adopting working class sensibilities with an indigenous connection has allowed the *musica conciente* artists to find the correlations between the immigrant experiences and belonging in the U.S. While it is difficult to compare the immigrant experience of Latin Americans, these artists create a transnational immigrant ethos in their music that transcends borders with messages of solidarity and human rights. Although these messages of solidarity and blurring the borders is present

¹⁰⁴ Marchi, "Hybridity and Authenticity in US Day of the Dead Celebrations," 280.

in *rock en Español*, pan-Latina/o experiences in the music also bring to light the very real struggles that many migrants and indigenous people still struggling against colonial rule endures.

Speaking to Rita about understanding first and second generation struggles for survival; she spoke about how it was difficult for her to compare.

I do feel like it is different, like I do feel like I can identify with feeling like an outsider in this country, but not to the degree that they (her parents) feel. Like I wasn't undocumented at any point in my life. I speak English pretty fluently, I feel like in many ways their experience has been different than mine. So I feel like I don't want to claim that our experience is the same.¹⁰⁵

Rita understands that despite similar feelings of belonging in the U.S., her English language proficiency allows her certain privileges that her parents simply do not have. While this privilege allows her to navigate more spaces in the U.S., she also speaks to the struggles that her parents did not have to endure. She continues:

...And they also didn't have to go through the education system here, I feel like most of their struggles are in labor, like my mom was a house cleaner and my dad was a construction worker and has been a construction worker for 25 years now, and most of my struggles have been in the education system since I have chosen to go through college and grad school now. I feel like so much of my identity is around that I feel like our experiences are not the same.¹⁰⁶

For many migrants who did not have the opportunity to attend school in their home countries, it becomes a great

¹⁰⁵ Rita, November 28, 2014.

¹⁰⁶ Rita, November 28, 2014.

priority to have their children achieve as much academic success as possible. While it is difficult to compare the physical labor to the mental labor, Rita begins to shed light on the extreme disconnect in experiences from one generation to the next. Despite these drastic experiential differences, second-generation migrants like Rita become activists for struggles like the Dream Act. While many Chicanas/os may not be the direct beneficiaries of the struggles they are in, they are connected to them because of a sense of cultural citizenship.

A sense of belonging to a community is driven by common lived experiences. While it is undeniable that formal citizenship status grants privileges in U.S. society, members of working class communities still encounter discrimination, racism, and oppression at the hands of local, state, and federal agencies. In her essay, "'Wise up!' Undocumented Latino Youth, Mexican-American Legislators, and the Struggle for Higher education Access" Hinda Seif states, "Cultural citizenship studies elucidate ways that Latinos 'struggle to build communities, claim social rights, and become recognized as active agents' in a country where even those who trace their families to the U.S. over generations 'feel rejected as full and equal citizens.'" ¹⁰⁷ Growing up in the barrio second and third generation Chicanas/os

¹⁰⁷ Hinda Seif, "'Wise up!' Undocumented Latino Youth, Mexican-American Legislators, and the Struggle for Higher education Access" in *Latinos and Citizenship: The Dilemma of Belonging*, ed. Suzanne Oboler, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 250.

experience discrimination and have been treated as second-class citizens subject to criminalization and public policies.

Creating a working class sensibility in the *musica conciente* connects first, second, and third generation Chicanas/os to the struggles of undocumented migrants; thus creating a working class immigrant ethos within the music and understanding of life in Los Angeles. Although each generation of migrants has distinct experiences, life in inner city Los Angeles is similar for all Latin American migrants. Their treatment as second-class citizens, regardless of status, is always conditional and thus creates a working class ethos that is shared by all.

Conclusion:

As demonstrated through my informants, *rock en Español* has the ability to create spaces to counter hegemonic narratives about Chicanas/os in the U.S. In spaces where the master narrative of American exceptionalism guides policies and laws that criminalize people that do not fit an exclusive standard of dominant society, the production of counter narratives are crucial to the survival of those marginalized. This chapter analyzed the construction of American exceptionalism and the oppressive environments they created for those that did not fit their standards. By looking at the connections between music and identity, I have examined spaces that allow for identity formation outside of U.S. standards. In comparing these two

narratives in American society, it is possible to highlight the explicit contradiction that guide living conditions of people on the margins. Employing *rock en Español* as a strategy of belonging, I have argued that this music allows its listeners to create an identity that is transnational in nature. By creating a transnational identity, Chicanas/os are able to understand themselves beyond the boundaries of U.S. narratives and to reconstruct their position within the nation.

"Ya me gritaron mil veces que me regrese a mi tierra, porque aqui no quepo yo. Quiero recordarle al gringo: Yo no cruce la frontera, la frontera me cruzo. America nacio libre, el hombre la dividio. Ellos pintaron la raya, para que yo la brincara. ¿y me llaman imbasor? Es un error bien marcado nos quitaron ocho estados. ¿quien es aqui el imbasor? Soy extranjero en mi tierra, y no vengo a darles guerra, soy hombre trabajador."¹⁰⁸-Tigres Del Norte

Chapter 5

"Detras de los Cerros:"

Rock en Español and a transnational Chicana/o identity

Growing up in a barrio of Los Angeles, California in the 1980's and 90's the son of Mexican immigrant parents, I came to question my identity as an "American." I emphasize "American" because although I do not necessarily want to claim the term to identify myself, I refuse to accept the term automatically to mean white. I am native to the Americas, my ancestors are native to the Americas, and if "American" is going to continue to mean white there should be an asterisk next to signify that they are not native and their language is foreign to this continent. In a country that demands the sole use of English in society, I hungered to recover my original language that I began to lose during my K-12 education. During my high school years in the mid to late 90's, I began to listen to rock en Español band Caifanes,

¹⁰⁸ "They have yelled at me a thousand times to return to my land, because I do not fit here. I want to remind the white man: I did not cross the border, the border crossed me. America was born free, man divided it. They painted the line, so I could jump it. And they call me invader? That is a mistake. They clearly took eight states from us. Who here is the invader? I am a stranger in my own land, and I do not come to start a war, I am a working man." Translated by author.

that later became the group *Jaguares*. The simple fact that I was listening to Spanish music in a place that required the use of English, allowed me to begin to question my "American" identity. Soon, I only listened to Spanish music and was dedicated to learning about the Zapatista movement, and activist movements throughout the world. Although I barely graduated high school because of misguidance, feelings of angst, and loss of interest, I felt that my true identity as a Mexican living in the U.S. would lead me to where I needed to be, *Detras de los Cerros*.¹⁰⁹

Rock en Español allowed me to question my position as a Mexican in the U.S. and led me to spaces throughout Los Angeles, via concert venues, that inspired my Chicano identity. While my initial understanding of my Chicano identity mainly consisted of a rejection of my "American" side and a romantic connection of my Aztec ancestry, these dialogues helped me question my place in U.S. society and to engage with transnational narratives like *rock en Español*. While, this identity may not have been totally accurate and may have negated the experiences of many indigenous people and their treatment in Mexico, this new identity allowed me to survive emotionally in a place that not only demanded conformity but also actively sought to erase my history, culture and dignity.

Because of my experience with exclusion, coercive losses and eternal alienation, I saw *rock en Español* as a site for

¹⁰⁹ *Jaguares*, "Detras de los Cerros," *El Equilibrio De Los Jaguares*, (RCA Records Labels, 1996).

resistance, creation, and survival for Chicanas/os growing up in the U.S. Through interviews and a literature review that speaks to the role that music has on identity, as well as conversations on transnational spaces, I have come to view *rock en Español* as a tool for resistance and survival for people of color in the U.S.

"Debajo De Tu Piel": Language and Authenticity in Chicana/o Communities

In her book, *I'm neither here nor there: Mexicans' quotidian struggles with migration and poverty*, Patricia Zavella speaks to the process of assimilation that is laid out for migrants and their children upon arrival to the U.S.

"Assimilation has been the dominant paradigm for analyzing mobility by the poor across national boundaries. Research in this field typically takes a linear approach, where migrations to the United States sets in motion discernible states of transition, settlement, and assimilation.¹¹⁰ Narratives of American exceptionalism and the American dream allows new migrants to believe that if they subscribe to these notions they will have a better chance of success. Zavella continues:

Assimilation is viewed as the process where subsequent generations embrace Americanness by speaking English, losing ethnic identifiers, engaging in upward mobility, eventually marrying into mainstream society, and experiencing Anglo conformity. Indeed, this view is

¹¹⁰ Zavella, Patricia. 2011. *I'm neither here nor there: Mexicans' quotidian struggles with migration and poverty* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 3).

foundational for America's identity yet the coercive ideology of assimilationism is often ignored.¹¹¹

It is difficult for second-generation migrants to create a notion of home when they are constantly taught that their cultural heritage is detrimental to their success in the U.S., and at the same time reminded that they do not belong.

No one throughout my K-12 education told me that there had been a long history of the U.S. opening its arms to Mexican workers when necessary, but then advocating repatriation when the need passed. No one taught us about the history of tensions between the U.S. and Mexico and the reasons why we were racialized and criminalized. No one educated us about the way brown bodies were used to break unions. Growing up in this environment often created moments of confusion as to who I needed to be, the fist pumping Mexican Spanish speaking kid walking out of class after the passing of Prop 187, or the English speaking kid that needed to read Shakespeare in order to go to college and succeed. These two people rarely met, especially in school, and I was led to believe that only one of them had a great future.

In his book *The New American Exceptionalism*, Donald E. Pease speaks to the narratives of American exceptionalism that allow for the oversight of violence in U.S. neighborhoods in the name of civility and progress.

But the fantasy of American exceptionalism produced beliefs to which the state has regularly taken exception, the state

¹¹¹ Zavella, Patricia, 3.

nevertheless needed the fantasy to solicit its citizenry's assent to its monopoly over the legitimate use of violence. The state presupposed this belief when it declared that its power to make and preserve laws at time required it to create exceptions to the laws it enforced.¹¹²

This oppressive environment forces many to create spaces of resistance that allow for daily survival and struggle. In *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity: Music, Race, and Spatial Entitlement in Los Angeles*, Gaye Theresa Johnson discusses how spaces for quotidian struggles are created in communities of color.

Studying the ways that entitlements of space and social membership were enacted through popular culture renewals the history of the promise of shared cultural politics among Black and Brown communities. Spatial entitlement has enormous implications for the study of Black and Brown working-class opposition, because it redresses inattention to the profound role that space plays in everyday life, as well as the cumulative role that everyday life plays in the development of mass movements.¹¹³

The music brings an awareness of global history and political struggles. Engagement with transnational spaces and awareness of struggles abroad begin to challenge the notions of American exceptionalism that has kept Chicanas/os in the position of being "strangers in their own land."

¹¹² Donald E. Pease, *The New American Exceptionalism* (Minnesota University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 12.

¹¹³ Gaye Theresa Johnson, *Spaces of conflict, sounds of solidarity music, race, and spatial entitlement in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), xiii.

A Transnational Chicana/o Identity

Rock en Español is one of the dynamic influences that many Chicanas/os experience in the barrio that allows them to survive in a country that demands assimilation but rejects egalitarianism. In her book *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa states,

In a constant state of nepantlism, an Aztec word meaning torn between ways, *la mestiza* is a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another. Being tricultural, monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual, speaking a patois, and in a state of perpetual transition, the *mestiza* faces the dilemma of the mixed breed: which collectivity does the daughter of a darkskinned mother listen to?¹¹⁴

By listening to music in Spanish, I argue Chicanas/os are taking back a language that is restricted, bringing their stories and identities to the forefront, much in the same way Chela Sandoval describes her concept of oppositional consciousness. She states:

What surfaces is the forgotten an underlayer of oppositional consciousness that quietly influenced the history of U.S.-Euro consciousness throughout the twentieth century. Exposed is a rhetoric of resistance, an apparatus for countering neocolonizing postmodern global formations... The apparatus is "love," understood as a technology for social transformation.¹¹⁵

In this way, *rock en Español* becomes a form of oppositional consciousness that begins to challenge mainstream notions of Chicana/o identity and creating their own. Here *rock en Español*

¹¹⁴ Gloria Anzaldúa, 100.

¹¹⁵ Chela Sandoval. *Methodology of the Oppressed*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, 1-2.

becomes a space where Chicanas/os can develop their voice in a variety of ways, socially, consciously, and literally in reclaiming their lost tongue.

In his book *Audiotopia: Music, Race and America*, Josh Kun describes how *rock en Español* creates new spaces that challenge standard narratives of listeners in the U.S.:

In narrating the experience of transborder migrations and drawing audiotopic connections between Chicanos and Mexicans-and in actually trying to use music to turn the Hollywood Palladium into a satellite province of Mexico-both El Tri and Maldita insert the spatial stories of music into what anthropologist Roger Rouse has outlined in another context as a two-way "transnational migrant circuit" of population, media, and information flow between Californian and Mexico.¹¹⁶

This information flow creates an environment for Chicanas/os to connect with their Mexican identity in a very unique way. For Sal, *rock en Español*, became a way to practice cultural difference. Being an insider into this world allowed him not only cultural pride, but also a sense of belonging.

I think it takes you back to your roots, man. It's a reminder of where you come from and how different we are from everybody else... Cuz not everyone can enjoy that kind of music cuz they don't know what they are saying. Like even with my girlfriend, she like to listen to it but a lot of times she doesn't know what it means. She will ask me "what does it say right, here?" So, her experience to listening to it, compared to my experience is different. Like she can get the whole chorus, melody, the whole musical instrument of the sound, like she can understand that, but she's not understating the lyrical concept of

¹¹⁶ Josh Kun, *Audiotopia: Music, Race and America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 198-199.

what the person is expressing. So, it kind of reminds you of how different we are, you know?¹¹⁷

As a form of cultural expression, *rock en Español* becomes a reflection of difference where many Chicanas/os can connect on a deeper level. Being in the know, when it comes to *rock en Español* groups becomes a form of underground consciousness that many Chicanas/os express at shows, through t-shirts, tattoos, or by bumping it in your *carro*. This difference becomes a source of pride and belonging that can become a powerful way for Chicanas/os to find a sense of home.

By engaging with narratives that counter U.S. anti-immigrant sentiments, second-generation Chicanas/os are creating spaces that allow for alternative forms of knowledge production; particularly around a sense of cultural pride. Kun continues:

As part of a new way of understanding how migration and community function within the U.S.-Mexico borderlands (i.e., it no longer operates according to outmoded, bipolar, push-pull paradigms of one-way traffic), the musical migrations of *rock en Español*'s performers and audiences contribute to the need for "a new cartography of social space," in that they occur through a variety of multipolar networks and "circuits" that are constituted by a shifting set of population and information flows. Heard in this way, *rock en Español* provides musical "networks" that connect disparate audiences and extend the boundaries of community through channels of musical communication.

These "musical networks" allow for Chicanas/os in the U.S. to reflect their politics of identity around a transnational perspective received from the music and the artists. Here the use of Spanish music becomes a transnational tactic used to create an

¹¹⁷ Sal, interview with Daniel Topete, March 25, 2014.

understanding and pride of Chicana/o origins that allow for what Benedict Anderson calls an "imagined community." Here it is an "imagined community" because it is often based on glorified understandings of what it means to be Mexican, rather than lived experience. Still, this is not to say that this "imagined community" is false. These understandings allow for Chicana/o communities to have pride in their identities in a place that treats them like second-class citizens. Patricia Zavella discusses how a sense of cultural citizenship is created around lived experience and the ways that transnational coalitions are created around music.

Thus, audience members-whether U.S. citizens of varied ethno-racial backgrounds, authorized residents, or undocumented migrants-who may have little in common materially or socially may find the consumption of certain types of popular culture enables them to feel a sense of cultural citizenship, a process of self-making and contesting nations-states' regimes of surveillance, discipline, and control. Cultural citizenship also includes transnational dimensions as subjects claim the right to perform identities, languages, or traditions from foreign cultures in public regardless of their legal status in the United States. Hence a sense of belonging is forged through cultural expressions, which become the basis for coalition building and agitation for social justice.¹¹⁸

In this way, cultural citizenship becomes a part of the imagined community as transnational ties are forged around music spaces. These transnational ties create possibilities to dismantle attempts at segregating communities of color and work toward a unifying movement that speaks across ethnicities. Anderson states,

¹¹⁸ Patricia Zavella, 192.

Finally, it is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.¹¹⁹

While this "limited imaging" can be problematic, it can also give agency to many people who feel helpless in an oppressed environment. This "imaged community" I argue is crucial to the survival of many Chicanas/os growing up in the U.S. and the creation of transnational music in America.

Although most of the famous *rock en Español* bands are from Latin America, the use of Spanish in music in U.S. creates a very unique experience of Chicanas/os. In his article "The Battle of Los Angeles: The Cultural Politics of Chicana/o Music in the Greater Eastside," Victor Hugo Viesca highlights the Chicana/o music scene during the 1990's in Los Angeles used multi-lingual lyrics to inform their music.

This scene is being led by a collective of socially conscious and politically active Latin-fusion bands that emerged in the 1990s, including Aztlán Underground, Blues Experiment, Lysa Flores, Ozomatli, Ollin, Quetzal, Quinto Sol, Slowrider, and Yeska. These groups compose original songs that weave together the sounds of the Americas, from soul, samba, and the *son jarocho* to reggae, rumba, and rap. Multilingual lyrics in Spanish, English, Cáló, or Nahuatl that speak to themes of urban exile, indigenous identity, and multiracial unity are layered over the music to produce

¹¹⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised Edition (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 7.

a sonic Chicana/o imaginary of the global city in the twenty-first century.¹²⁰

These eclectic sounds speak to a very specific audience of Chicanas/os whose experiences and musical taste reflects these groups from East Los Angeles. Identity formation for Chicanas/os in U.S. inner cities is further complicated by coalitions across cultural markers. Here Johnson discusses collectives that are created around what she calls "spatial entitlement."

I advance here a concept that I call "spatial entitlement," a way in which marginalized communities have created new collectives based not just upon evictions and exclusion from physical places, but also on new and imaginative uses of technology, creativity, and spaces... Spatial entitlements created new articulations, new sensibilities, and new visions about the place of Black, Brown, and working-class people on the local and national landscape.¹²¹

Exposure to various sounds and movements throughout the inner cities of the U.S., creates spaces where intersections of race and identity can occur.

Luis was able to find his "spatial entitlement" through hip-hop. As a first generation migrant who came to the U.S. as a young child and changed this primary language to English, hip-hop became a stage for him to challenge institutions of oppression.

¹²⁰ Victor Hugo Viesca, "The Battle of Los Angeles: The Cultural Politics of Chicana/o Music in the Greater Eastside," in *Los Angeles and the Future of Urban Cultures: A Special Issue of American Quarterly* ed. Raul Homero Villa and George J. Sanchez (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2005), 221.

¹²¹ Gaye Theresa Johnson, *Spaces of conflict, sounds of solidarity music, race, and spatial entitlement in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), x.

What it meant before, I think it allowed voice. It meant that I knew a language, I felt like I knew a third language... I would say that a lot to people, I feel like I know a third language and its cool and it's an exclusive thing, a lot of people don't know about it, cuz it goes beyond just the language there's knowledge, there's things that are being said and there's a way it is being said and that empowered me.¹²²

With this "third language" Luis began to develop a voice that allowed him to build a platform for resistance, although as a teenager maybe was not able to quite articulate it to authority figures. Luis continues:

When I would hear Chuck D say certain things and say it with force, I would be 'oh fuck yeah he's right!' It made me think things and that was really, really empowering. So that was like a hidden language that I would push back at school... it was a push back. I remember I would wear EPMD shirts, and medallions... I would wear medallions and people would be like 'What!?!' I remember saying to my English teacher 'it's cuz you don't know what's up!' and he would just look at me funny and I would leave it at that cuz I wasn't able to explain my self the way I wanted to.

For Luis, hip-hop became a way to begin to reclaim something that he felt he had lost, by reaching across inner-city borders to find inspiration for a new form of cultural identity. Although Luis found much opposition to his newfound identity, including from teachers, he was able to find a source of empowerment in a society that pushes complacency.

Spanish Rock and its Relevance

While most of the *rock en Español* that I was listening to at this time did not explicitly have politicized lyrics, like

¹²² Luis, Interview with Daniel Topete, March 25, 2014.

Caifanes, Jaguares, Maldita Vecindad, El Gran Silencio, the small references were enough for me to begin to question my position as a Chicano in the U.S. These spaces around *rock en Español* allowed me to begin my search for an identity that I felt was "true" and that was denied to me growing up. The "hybridity" of *rock en Español* allowed me to express the complicated notions of identity that would never be "truly" Mexican nor "truly" American. Similarly, Ignacio felt disconnected from listening to the Spanish music that his parents listened to, but also the English music on the radio. For him *rock en Español* became a way to identify with two worlds that seemed to be conflicting.

I feel like they merge, the fusion of rock and Spanish, like that kinda made me feel like I had an identity where I can relate to it. It still held on to the roots, it was in Spanish, and it was talking about what it was talking about. To me it was something other than *rancheras*. It was something out of my norm, which was old school traditional Mexican, you know. It was kinda like the best of both worlds, you know. I could relate to both.¹²³

Being able to retain or reclaim a sense of cultural roots becomes a source of empowerment for Chicanas/os who listen to *rock en Español*. A connection/investment to spaces around *rock en Español* allow for many Chicanas/os to create counter hegemonic narratives of their community that influence their identity formation in what Josh Kun describes as a "*rock reconquista*." He states, "Thus, *rock's reconquista* involves both the takeover of U.S. rock vocabularies and stylistic lexicons and an audio-geographical takeover of the national and regional territories

¹²³ Ignacio, Interview with Daniel Topete, March 25, 2014.

signified and represented within the music itself."¹²⁴ The *reconquista* has allowed many second-generation Chicanas/os to take pride in a language that was/is restricted. In turn, this pride allowed me to begin to question the notions of my inferiority that is so infused in the U.S. assimilation process.

Both *rock en Español* and Chicana/o identity challenge master narratives that categorize and restrict possibilities of growth outside those boundaries. With concepts like "Ni De Aqui, Ni De Alla" and "We Didn't Cross, The Borders Crossed Us," *rock en Español* and Chicanas/o identity both complicate the understanding of what is authentic and real. In her book, *Oye Como Va!: Hybridity and Identity in Latino Popular Music* by Deborah Pacini Hernandez, she states:

Unsurprisingly, given these fundamental conceptual differences, discourses regarding cultural hybridity in (and about) the United States have been markedly different from those employed in (and about) Latin America. Scholars and other observers of Latin American music and culture routinely refer to the biological and cultural mixing that cultural and musical developments, particularly in areas with predominantly of African descent, the terms "creolization" or "syncretism" are used. In the United States, in contrast, where anxieties about racial and cultural mixing persist, bipolar music, such as the widely (if controversially) used term "black music" to describe the music's associated with African communities (most, if not all, of which are, to some degree, the product of cultural mixture).¹²⁵

As these concepts of hybridity create "anxieties" by challenging normative understanding of Chicanas/os, these spaces

¹²⁴ Josh Kun, 187.

¹²⁵ Deborah Pacini Hernandez, *Oye Como Va!: Hybridity and Identity in Latino Popular Music* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2010), 6.

are creating geographical pockets where people feel free to express their identity; i.e. in cities like Los Angeles and Chicago, but also in neighborhoods throughout the U.S. For Corina, *rock en Español* allowed her to understand her identity in a much more complex way than just Mexican-American. She states:

Yeah, it opened up a whole other world for me especially because the lyrics are so deep, in the sense that they have deep personally, like in terms of the self, like identity, culture... they are so multi-faceted and multi-dimensional that I can definitely reflect to them and they have affected the way I see myself.¹²⁶

The transnational messages in *rock en Español* allow Chicanas/os to see their identity as complex and dynamic. It can also create nostalgic notions of a Mexican home as a site of cultural reclamation.

The fact that many of the popular *rock en Español* groups are from Mexico or Latin America, creates an "imagined" connection to those nations while in the U.S. Lyrics that reference specific sites allow many Chicanas/os to create a glorified nationalistic understanding of their native land or at least a space that is not dominated by Anglos and Anglo culture. Feelings of displacement for many Chicanas/os can lead to a strong nationalistic view of a country many have only visited as a form of survival and identity formation. While there could be consequences for this "fantasy" if ever confronted with some realities of living in those spaces, the need to romanticize a

¹²⁶ Corina. Interview with Daniel Topete, November 11, 2014.

nation speaks to the restlessness and oppressive nature of living in the U.S. as an "outsider."

The need to always know that there is something waiting for you somewhere else can have great impact on the way a person lives day to day. *Rock en Español* has the ability to create the "fantasy" that so many people need to be reminded that there is a place they belong, if only for the length of a song. In her book, *Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries*, Karen Tongson describes how The Smiths and Morrissey cover band, Butchlalis de Panochitlan (BdP) use fantasy to find agency in Southern California. "

Rather than scripting escape through moments of fantasy, the BdP harness fantasy in the minimal theatrical production as a mode of critique and as an archival practice with the potential to kindle enduring systems of collective support and queer bonds.¹²⁷

In this manner, Chicanas/os participate in these spaces that allows them the ability to express their identity as reflected by lived experience, even creating ways to understand nationalism, neocolonialism, and globalization.

Although, this "fantasy" is created outside of the nation, it does not mean that their understanding of those countries is entirely false. The transnational practices and large number of Latino people in some cities in the U.S., like Los Angeles, have created spaces that are in constant dialogue with Latin American

¹²⁷ Karen Tongson, *Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 164.

countries. For Chantico, the transnational and cross-genre dialogues in *rock en Español* created connections to her life in the U.S. but also nostalgic notions of home with musical covers of traditional Mexican singer.

There has to be something about the consciousness that is being put into the music, *porque no hacen musica nomas a lo pendejo*¹²⁸, I mean their songs are deep and I think even without being consciously aware of what the songs say there is an awareness, an unspoken awareness of what is being said and that people identify with and I think that is what makes them different in that sense. *Si van a ver gente que va decir que son fresa*¹²⁹, there is that... but there are also gonna be people who say *que son una chigoneria*¹³⁰... they are fucken badass! you know they say some deep shit. So *aventarse*¹³¹ "la negra tomasa" even the covers they do, they do covers for Juan Gabriel, for you know, *gente del pueblo*¹³². They are not doing covers for bourgeois ass Mexicans. They are doing solid covers and it is intentional.¹³³

This transnational dialogue allows for Chicanas/os to engage with Latin American customs although they may have never stepped foot in their parents home nation. Creating consciousness around Mexicanidad gives Chicanas/os like Chantico a voice to express the anger, pain, resentment, etc. that one feels toward systems of oppression. Consciousness in these spaces allows you to both raise your fist in resistance to oppressive power

¹²⁸ "They do not just blindly make music," translated by author.

¹²⁹ "There will be people who say that they are upper-class spoiled," translated by author.

¹³⁰ "That they are badass," translated by author.

¹³¹ "Throw down," translated by author.

¹³² "People of the community," translated by the author.

¹³³ Chantico, interview with Daniel Topete, August 7, 2014.

structures and raise your arms for the *baile*. Pacini Hernandez writes,

Compared to their predecessors, many newer immigrants, especially those living within large ethnic enclaves in cities such as Los Angeles and New York, have been relatively insulated from U.S. mainstream culture. Their musical practices, however, also reveal rich dialogues with well-established bilingual, bicultural Latinos born and raised in the United States, whose musical sensibilities have been shaped less by their connections to Latin America than by their locations within the United States' extraordinarily diverse (if hierarchical) cultural landscape.¹³⁴

This insulation may only reflect a small piece of the American landscape, but those spaces reflect identities that continue to change the way the American mainstream speaks about Latinas/os in the U.S. Still, this is not to say that this insulation has created a utopian environment, as many of these sites were and continue to be over policed, racist, sexist, and abused spaces.

As *rock en Español* created spaces for liberation for many Chicanas/os, many still experienced the inequality and violence that is prominent in American culture. While many Chicanas/os are constructing identities that challenge standard understandings of their communities, it was still under hetero-patriarchal frameworks. In her book *Loca Motion: The Travels of Chicana and Latina Popular Culture*, Michelle Habell-Pallán speaks to the violence faced in spaces that challenged Chicana identity politics:

¹³⁴ Deborah, Pacini Hernandez, 12.

In addition, their narratives document the effects of the shrinking of the public sphere because of the economic privatization that plagued the 1980s and that continues to this day. In other words, theirs is a story of transnationalism told from the bottom up, in the years leading up to accords like NAFTA, from the point of view of working-class women. Though each woman's experience was different, each was attracted to the punk subculture because it was a place where she could re-imagine the world she lived in; it was a place where she could see herself as an empowered subject.¹³⁵

Although these spaces continue to fall under hetero-patriarchal rule, for many Chicanas/os they continue to be sites that have the potential for social change from within their community. By incorporating social movements of the past to inform the spaces and music, sites like the 1980s punk scene were able to continue the struggle in different and creative ways. As these changes are attempts to create spaces for social justice, many Chicanas/os look to the past to construct a better future.

They create a new framework of interracial and transnational affiliations rooted in local experiences of racism, struggle, and displacement. In the 1970s and 1980s in Los Angeles, Black and Brown antiracist politics were fashioned from a unique sense of self that included collective memories of displacement because of urban renewal, exile, and labor rights, resources, recognition, and peace. This shared sense of self was connected to the people and places surrounding these social actors.¹³⁶

A connection around a transnational space creates spaces for people of color to become agents for global struggles from the comforts of home. Music here becomes a vehicle for

¹³⁵ Michelle Habell-Pallán, *Loca Motion: The Travels of Chicana and Latina Popular Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 156.

¹³⁶ Gaye Theresa Johnson, *Spaces of conflict, sounds of solidarity music, race, and spatial entitlement in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 126.

transnational dialogues that informs consciousness and alliances along a sense of shared experiences. For many Chicanas/os *rock en Español* becomes a space that validates counter-narratives and demystifies American exceptionalism. At the very least this begins conversations to empower people of color through conscious critical thought.

Conclusion:

In 2002, I attended a Jaguares concert at the House of Blues, Los Angeles. The group was celebrating Mexican Independence day with first generation Mexicans and Chicana/os as they often do. At this moment the group had become a voice to raise awareness of the murders of hundreds of women in Juarez, Mexico. Still, for many Mexicana/os and Chicanas/os this day was designated to celebrate Mexicanidad as they have in the past and with their favorite rock en Español group. During the show an audience member threw a Mexican flag toward the lead singer Saul Hernandez. Hernandez picked up the flag, opened it up, looks at it for a few seconds, and says "que chinge su madre Mexico."¹³⁷ With a crowd full of Mexicans celebrating an identity that is criminalized in their home, most of the crowd began to boo the adored singer. He then retracts his comment and says "bueno que chinge su madre el gobierno Mexicano, que viva la gente

¹³⁷ Mother fuck Mexico. Translated by author.

Mexicana.”¹³⁸ This comment quickly gained back the crowds adoration as they cheered for him.

As a young 22 year old trying desperately to regain pride in my ancestry, this exchange between Hernandez and his fans stuck with me. For me a connection to my Mexican identity has never been about nationalistic pride or a connection to the country’s political government. In fact, my connection to a Mexican identity has been in direct opposition to the country’s policies and atrocities done to its citizens. This has always been a space for me to challenge oppressive structures on both sides of the border and to find pride in my Mexican ancestry that is very much tied to the struggles my family has endured. *Rock en Español* was/is a space that allowed me to begin a journey to understand my Mexican, American, and Chicano identity on my own terms.

The focus on a transnational identity in this chapter was used to raise questions about the politics of space making and engagement with *rock en Español* as a site for the creation of oppositional identities. This space around *rock en Español* in the U.S. is a challenge to hegemonic understandings of who Chicanas/os are supposed to be and what their role is within the American mainstream. By highlighting the inequalities within these spaces, I have attempted to document the struggles, past and present, which inform much of the identity politics in

¹³⁸ “Mother fuck the Mexican government, long live the Mexican people.” Translated by author.

Chicana/o communities, and to show the important role music has played in the creation of Chicana/o subjectivity.

Rock en Español allowed us the space to sing and practice a language that we could only speak at home. Although at first I would struggle to grasp all the lyrics because of the speed groups would sing or simply because I did not know the words, the simple fact that I was listening to this music sparked a voice within me that I knew mattered in this society. Soon, I started speaking Spanish to my friends and searching for spaces that expressed my identity. Whether it was sneaking into "Mi Hacienda Night Club" in Pico Rivera with my friend's fake ID, or simply listening to my *Caifanes* CD in my room, I am certain this music allowed me to find value in my identity and language, even if the rest of society did not.

"Es la conciencia, es una lágrima de mi forma de resistencia. Es mi sacramento exacto, es tu gangrena es mi impotencia."¹³⁹-
Jaguares

"Oh si señor, el barrio donde vivo me enseñó a resistir. Oye si, oh si señor el barrio donde vivo me enseñó a sobrevivir."¹⁴⁰-
Panteón Rococó

Chapter 6

Conclusion: "Fin"¹⁴¹

If it was not for *rock en Español*, I do not think I would be writing a dissertation. *Rock en Español*, specifically *Caifanes* and *Jaguares* allowed me to begin to question my identity, consciousness, and gender performance. This music made me feel like it was okay to be different, and that I did not have to be ashamed of my culture, language, and ethnicity. I carry these messages with me as I continue my educational career, and they became louder as I started my Ph.D. program in Minnesota; so far from any notion of home. After sitting in classrooms with only a few people of color and getting blank stares as I shared my Chicana/o Studies voice, it became clear to me that these

¹³⁹ Jaguares "El Milagro," *El Equilibrio de los Jaguares* (RCA Records, 1996). "It's consciousness, it's a tear in the form of my resistance. It's my exact sacrament, it's your gangrene, it's my impotence." Translated by the author.

¹⁴⁰ Panteón Rococó. "Abajo y a la Izquierda," *Panteón Rococó* (Import, 2007). "Oh yes sir, the neighborhood where I lived taught me to resist. Listen yes, oh yes sir, the neighborhood where I live taught me to survive." Translated by author.

¹⁴¹ This references the Jaguares song "Fin." "Fin. Todo tiene un fin, menos el fuego de tus ojos. Que se pierden profundo en el misterio de las historias que no cuenta." End. Everything has an end. Except the fire in your eyes that gets lost in the profoundness of mystery and of stories that do not get told. Translated by author.

programs were not made for people like me. I would get in my car after class and contemplate what was the fastest route back to my L.A. home. I would think about all the sacrifice and love from my family, as they saw us away with a big party upon completing our masters program. I would remember the proud tone in my family's voice when they would tell anyone who would listen, "Va tener un doctorado¹⁴²." Then I would get in my car, turn the volume all the way up to my favorite *Caifanes* song "Aviéntame," and sing at the top of my lungs: "Aviéntame. Aviéntame hasta donde quieras, y luego ven a mirar como revive. Aviéntame. Aviéntame hasta donde quieras, y luego ven a mirar como no muerdo, como aguanto."¹⁴³ These lyrics of pain, suffering, resiliency, and determination would trigger my inner strength as I yelled out my anger and frustration with the chorus. Then, I would input my Minneapolis address to my GPS to wait for another week of humiliation and blank stares.

Completing this dissertation has become a way for me to begin the healing process from years of trauma, humiliation, and cultural loss as I made my way through the U.S. educational system. I can say that what got me through was the strength that I received from my "Amá"¹⁴⁴ and from my family. At the most difficult times being in a foreign place, constantly being

¹⁴² "He's going to have a doctorate," translated by author.

¹⁴³ Caifanes, "Aviéntame," *Caifanes* (Sony U.S. Latin, 1988). "Throw me. Throw me where you want, but then come and see how I come back to life. Throw me. Throw me where you want, but then come and see how I do not die, how I endure." Translated by author.

¹⁴⁴ Short for Mama or Mother.

questioned and devalued; I would try to remember why I was doing this. I would see videos and hear songs like Saúl Hernández's song, "*Fuerte*"¹⁴⁵ which connects the source of Mexican strength and pride with the heart. "*Fuerte*" is a dedication to the people that have been disappeared by the Mexican government, and the strength of a people that continues to exist in the face of continual colonial rule. "*Podrás quemar toda mi historia. Podrás quitarme la razón. Podrás esconderme la memoria, Pero jamás mi corazón.*" At the center of this strength and resiliency is the heart of *Mexicano* people. The video to "*Fuerte*" shows Mexican people with strong and serious faces, lip-singing the lyrics to the song right into the camera. A message giving to the colonizers that continue to kill and disappear Latino people, that people of color's lives are not expendable. "*Fuerte*" ends with words of resiliency and strength "*Y es que hoy estoy fuerte. Más fuerte que nunca.*"¹⁴⁶ The video shows this strength through images of Aztec dancers, murals of Mexica culture, and faces of Mexican people, and I would remember that I am doing this because our voices do matter.

I bring up this "*fuerza*," not to essentialize my family's struggles, my unconventional path through education, or even to prove how tough it was growing up in the barrio, but rather to raise awareness of alternate forms of knowing and learning that

¹⁴⁵ Saúl Hernández, "*Fuerte*," *Mortal*, (Imports, 2014). "Strong," Translated by author.

¹⁴⁶ "And it's because today I am strong. Stronger than ever." Translated by author.

are rarely accepted in academia. I carry these experiences with me everywhere I go, just as a white person carries their privilege into the classroom. Still, the nature of academia forces people of color to justify their experiences to conform to the white knowledge base. In her book, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, bell hooks discusses how white essentialism is rarely questioned in academia as she reflects on Diana Fuss's *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference*.

In her narrative it is always a marginal "other" who is essentialist. Yet the politics of essentialist exclusion as a means of asserting presence, identity, is a cultural practice that does not emerge solely from marginalized groups. And when those groups do employ essentialism as a way to dominate in institutional settings, they are often imitating paradigms for asserting subjectivity that are part of the controlling apparatus in structures of domination. Certainly many white male students have brought to my classroom an insistence on the authority of experience, that enables them to feel that anything they have to say is worth hearing, that indeed their ideas and experience should be the central focus of classroom discussion. The politics of race and gender within white supremacist patriarchy grants them this "authority" without their having to name the desire for it.¹⁴⁷

In this way, this dissertation does not use experiential knowledge to essentialize it, but as a tool to create oppositional voices to the white canonical base that constantly negates them. This is not to say that experiential knowledge should be the sole pedagogical tool in the classroom, simply that there should also be a space where it can exist without ridicule

¹⁴⁷ bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 81.

and/or consequences.

Having a voice in academia is central to many people of color, especially in classrooms that are mostly white students. Students of color in academia have to engage mostly with a white canonical base, white classroom politics of discussion, and for the most part white professors. For those students who need other forms of knowledge, they are forced to find their own spaces to reflect on their academic works outside of the classroom. In this way, many engage with identity politics in order to navigate yet another site of oppression in the classroom. bell hooks continues:

Identity politics emerges out of the struggles of oppressed or exploited groups to have a standpoint on which to critique dominant structures, a position that gives purpose and meaning to struggle. Critical pedagogies of liberation respond to these concerns and necessarily embrace experience, confessions and testimony as relevant ways of knowing, as important, vital dimensions of any learning process.¹⁴⁸

While asserting personal experience, identity politics, and oppositional knowledge in academia by people of color can be seen as essentialist, it is crucial that these voices continue to exist as long as the white supremacist cannon exists. Although there are many who excel in the current academic setting, the extremely low numbers of people of color in higher education should be evidence of the need for intervention.

This dissertation used interdisciplinary methods to discuss

¹⁴⁸ bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 88-89.

the complexities of Chicana/o identity formations in the U.S. Archival research, participant observation, ethnographic fieldwork, and oral histories have continued a long history of Chicana/o scholarship that sheds light on the lived realities of people of color in the U.S.

I underscored the influences that *rock en Español* groups *Caifanes* and *Jaguares* have in the development of a Mexican identity for their Chicana/o audience. These groups investment of having concerts and benefits in the U.S. on Mexican holidays, speaks to value they place on Chicana/o connections to a Mexican homeland. This chapter spoke to the way this group complicates romantic notions of Mexico through their music, videos, and lyrics all the while creating a strong connection to their audience through cultural iconography. Archival research produced newspaper and magazine article on the Caifanes and Jaguares from the U.S. and Mexico. Exploring themes that appeared, participation in social activism, spirituality, and Mexican nationalism, I discussed the differences and similarities of how these groups were written about in each country. Complicating conventional understanding of Chicana/o identity in the U.S., allows for an opportunity to question participation in the Americanization process by reimagining notions of authentic cultural markers.

I focused on a history of nation building and process of Americanization that exists for many migrants in the U.S. I

examined the Americanization process that occurs in the public school systems for Chicanas/os and the ways they negotiate their identity in the U.S. Focusing on alternative spaces, in particular an engagement with *rock en Español*, this work investigated the ways that Chicanas/os begin to take back their language, culture, and traditions.

By focusing on transnational spaces I shed light on the ways Chicanas/os engage with people of color across and within borders, and how this informs a sense of identity formation. I also focused on music that created transnational spaces through concert venues, album art, and lyrics. A focus on these transnational spaces was done to highlight the positive messages Chicanas/os receive about their language and cultural heritage, and how this translates to a positive sense of self. With this positive self-esteem Chicanas/os are more likely to perform better in school and U.S. society.

Finally, I discussed through the use of personal narrative and ethnographic fieldwork, how people of color are forced to lose their language, respect for their culture, and respect for themselves. With great emphasis on oral histories, I spoke to the struggles that many Chicana/os go through with the loss of language and the devaluation of their cultural heritage in U.S. public schools. Literature on Chicana feminist thought guided a discussion on the strategies many students of color employ in order to survive mentally and spiritually in and out of U.S.

institutions.

In my educational journey I have encountered many of the obstacles that push-out students of color from academia. From being held back in kindergarten because of language barriers to being told by high school counselors that I was not university material. My goal as I enter the classrooms is to create an environment that values students' experiences and makes them part of the pedagogy. Students who have experienced traumatic situations in the classroom are likely to develop a sense of scholarly identity that does not reflect their day-to-day lived experience. For them, success lies in negating the value in their culture, language, identity, gender, sexuality, etc. Those who enter higher education typically have displayed a level of disengagement that is required from student to be considered productive and worthy of advancement.

While it is not my mission to force students who are invested in this system to change, it is my goal to challenge the notion that this is the only way to advance in higher education. At the most basic level, I hope that the classroom becomes a space that demystifies the exclusive narratives of knowledge that have negated many people from entering higher education. While at some level my very existence as a person of color in these spaces begins to challenge hegemonic notions of knowledge, I believe it is crucial to engage my identity politics with class pedagogies.

Although for many a level of disengagement is crucial to creating scholarship, I believe that this fosters an insincere environment with students, and continues the notion of professors as distant and unattainable. I do not propose to radically change the classroom environment as this can also be disruptive to student learning, but simply challenge factors that make students anxious, nervous, or stressed about their interaction with scholarship and/or scholars.

While I would like students to be comfortable with their voice in the classroom, I believe it is crucial especially in interdisciplinary courses to also be comfortable with discomfort. This can be a challenging endeavor as discomfort may be associated with trauma or violence for many people. Although it is important to have an environment where disagreements is an acceptable part of the dialogue, it is crucial to monitor high levels of stress and anxiety, and reassure students of the course mission. I have seen people storm out of classrooms and in one extreme occasion witnessed threats of physical damage because of ideological disagreements. Although it can be risky to engage with discomfort in the classroom, it can also foster an environment for life-long learning.

I understand that not all students may engage with a class in the way the instructor may desire, but I believe is important to create an environment of high expectations and love of learning in every classroom. An instructor should embody that

desire to see students grow and to allow oneself to grow alongside them, especially when confronted with the reality of teaching outside your expertise. Creating a classroom where the instructor may be leading but is not the sole proprietor of knowledge, allows students a space to develop their academic voices and to learn to critically analyze relations of power.

While it may be cliché at this point to incorporate Paulo Freire's pedagogical practices, I think it is crucial to understand how academia has been an oppressive sight for many. For students to simply sit and receive knowledge to pass a class does not allow them the opportunity to be life-long learners. Simply ingesting knowledge to regurgitate it later does not foster an environment for the love of learning. I firmly believe that learning is not simply done in the classrooms or through books, and although in academia this may be the primary source of reference, making the connections between different levels of understanding creates more engaged learners.

Connecting methodologies of home to academia can give Chicanas/os a renewed love of learning, especially for those who struggle to find a voice in mainstream U.S. fields of knowledge. I focused on music as an essential survival strategy, a counter narrative, and a significant component of Chicana/o subjectivity. I explored the ways in which *rock en Español* plays a vital role in the resilience of Mexican, Mexican American, Chicana/o and other Latina/o youth in the late 20th and early 21st centuries in

the U.S. Engaging with spaces of reclamation of culture, language, and traditions allows people of color to create a strong sense of voice in spaces that have historically been denied to them. This voice creates a strong sense of self that can start the healing process of the trauma of loss.

As stated in the Caifanes song "*Perdí mi ojo de venado*,"¹⁴⁹ "Hazme una limpa por favor, amor. Despójame de todo mal carnal. Quema mi ramo por favor, amor. Antes que yo te quemé a tí, a tí."¹⁵⁰ These lyrics connected traditions practiced at home by my mother, that my U.S. education had told me were backward and uncivilized. I began to see my mother as powerful knowledge producer and a carrier of a tradition that has survived colonial interventions. Saúl Hernandez speaks of a cleansing of the soul that is necessary for many Chicanas/os who have been robbed and scared by the U.S. For me my *limpia* has come in the form of *rock en Español*, ethnic studies, connecting to my cultural identity, having pride in my culture, and writing this dissertation. As I follow the path left by those before me, I hope to continue to fight for my voice in spaces like academia and that it widens the path for those to come.

¹⁴⁹ "I lost my Deer's eye" Deer's eye is a seed of the Mucana Sloanei that is used Latino cultures to protect children from evil eye.

¹⁵⁰ Caifanes, "*Perdí mi ojo de venado*," (Tell me your life) *Caifanes* (RCA International, 1988). Translation by author: "Give me a cleansing, my love. Rid me of all evil brother. Please burn my branch, my love. Before before I burn you, burn you."

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